

## EPSU POLICY PAPER

### LIFELONG LEARNING FOR ALL

#### 1. Introduction

This policy paper addresses some key issues for the social dialogue concerning lifelong learning at the local, regional, national and European levels. It deals with the important connections between lifelong learning and employment, public service restructuring and equal opportunities.

The paper addresses the role of lifelong learning for the public service unions in the following areas:

- Lifelong learning and the European context
- Collective bargaining and the social dialogue
- The challenge of quality public services
- Employment and employability
- Working time and learning time
- Work organisation and learning organisations
- Equal opportunities
- Enlargement
- Widening participation in learning and opening up access to all
- Innovation in teaching and learning and valuing skills
- Resources, rights and responsibilities
- Trade union education and training
- Recommendations

Lifelong learning encompasses formal and informal learning at all stages in an individual's life course. Lifelong learning must be seen in the widest possible sense as contributing to:

- Economic and employment growth, including job creation, employability, and economic development particularly within the context of the Information Society.
- High quality, citizen orientated, accessible and transparent public services.
- New forms of work organisation and working time, linked to a culture of learning.
- Individual learning, capacity and skills.
- Personal development and fulfilment.
- Equal opportunities between women and men.
- Active citizenship, community development and participatory democracy.
- Social inclusion, and social, economic and territorial cohesion

Lifelong learning is an important element of a coordinated collective bargaining strategy in the public services and of the European social model. It is a cornerstone of quality public services, quality work, trade union rights, equality between women and men and a citizen's Europe. The commitment to lifelong learning is reinforced in the European Public Services Charter<sup>1</sup>, the conclusions of the EPSU 2000 General Assembly<sup>2</sup>, EPSU collective bargaining policy<sup>3</sup>, EPSU Policy on Working Time<sup>4</sup>, EPSU policy on Gender Equality<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Public Interest: Public Services for People in Europe, ETUC Public Services Charter

<sup>2</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Lisbon, 2000

<sup>3</sup> Public Service Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining in a European Environment, 2000

EPSU believes that new approaches to learning and new innovations are needed if lifelong learning is able to seriously address unemployment, skills deficits and mismatches in the labour market, competency and skills development, social and regional inequalities, poverty and social exclusion.

The Information Society provides many new opportunities and challenges in the public services. In particular there are many opportunities for transforming public services through e-Government<sup>6</sup>. It is imperative that everyone, whether they be working or not, has access to the skills and knowledge required to participate in the Information Society. It is particularly important that these opportunities are available to older as well as younger workers, women as well as men, skilled as well as unskilled workers.

## **2. Lifelong learning and the European context**

Lifelong learning is now firmly embedded in the European Employment Guidelines as well as the European strategy against social exclusion. It was central to the Lisbon European Council which set the objective to “strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy” in the context of “sustainable economic growth and more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

Since then the conclusions of the Nice Summit and the adoption of a New Agenda for Social Policy, the recommendations of the Stockholm European Council and the importance attached to lifelong learning at the Barcelona Summit (March 2002) have all reinforced the importance of a European strategy on lifelong learning.

The European Commission’s Memorandum on Lifelong Learning<sup>7</sup> provides an important impetus for this European lifelong learning strategy and EPSU welcomes the guiding principle that lifelong learning is a “basic component of the European social model”. The adoption of the European Commission’s Communication<sup>8</sup>, on a European area of lifelong learning presented to the Barcelona European Council, also reinforces the importance of lifelong learning to European competitiveness.

EPSU believes that the implementation of the strategy requires more concerted and coordinated action at local, regional, national and European levels, with clear rights and responsibilities, the allocation of new resources, new ways of delivering learning within a framework widening participation. This means opening up access to lifelong learning for all, creating local learning partnerships, more coordination between government agencies and departments, as well as cooperation and partnership between the social partners at local, regional, national and European levels.

## **3. Collective bargaining, the social dialogue and lifelong learning**

EPSU believes that lifelong learning should be part of a coordinated approach to collective bargaining at local, regional, national and European levels. In turn, this is essential to providing high quality public services. This is reinforced in the ETUC Congress Resolution for

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<sup>4</sup> An active working time policy: for employment, time sovereignty and equal opportunities, 2000

<sup>5</sup> Gender Equality policy, 2000

<sup>6</sup> See for instance the European Commission’s action plan on e-Government, [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/eeurope/action\\_plan/egov/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/action_plan/egov/index_en.htm)

<sup>7</sup> “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning”, SEC (2000)1832, Brussels

<sup>8</sup> “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality”, Communication from the Commission, November 2001

a European System of Industrial Relations, EPSU policy on collective bargaining, and progress towards the closer coordination of collective bargaining under the Doorn Initiative<sup>9</sup>.

EPSU welcomes the importance attached to the role of the social partners in the European Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, particularly in the development of framework agreements on lifelong learning and in negotiating more flexible working arrangements in order to allow for time for learning. EPSU also welcomes the four priorities established by the social partners at the European level in the context of the "Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications". These priorities are:

- the identification and anticipation of competencies and qualifications needs;
- recognition and validation of competencies and qualifications;
- information, support and guidance;
- resources.

There is a need to enhance the role of lifelong learning through the social dialogue. This also means working towards the establishment of the social dialogue at the European level and the creation of employer's structures at the European level that can develop autonomous bargaining structures. The development of the European social dialogue in the public services is very important to initiatives on lifelong learning.

In local and regional government EPSU and the CEMR Employers Platform have emphasised the importance of vocational education and training. In the 1997 Joint Statement on Employment they argued that "It is important that the education and training systems are better targeted to meet the changing skill requirements in the labour market. Similarly, the Joint Declaration on the Modernisation of Public Services agreed in 1996 stressed the importance of cooperation in the area of vocational training since this "could have positive employment effects". The 1998 Joint Declaration on Equal Opportunities also recognised of the equal opportunities dimension to training and development.

The social partners in electricity sector have also reiterated the importance of lifelong learning. EUROLECTRIC-EMCEF-EPSU signed a joint declaration in 2000 in order to facilitate the European-level social dialogue. One of their four key areas for action is lifelong learning. This states that the social partners will:

Explore good practices in lifelong learning and the redeployment of staff and examine the conditions under which lifelong learning can contribute to secure and skilled employment, by setting up a specific Working Group within the Sectoral Dialogue Committee.

This Working Group is carrying out a project on lifelong learning to survey current practices in lifelong learning in the electricity sector. The survey questionnaire is collecting information on the skills and training issues that are relevant to competitiveness in the European electricity sector. This will enable the social partners to better understand developments in the sector and to take appropriate action on lifelong learning.

#### **4. The challenge of quality public services**

Delivering quality public services to Europe's citizens is increasingly under pressure in a climate of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. At the same time national, regional and local authorities, and users and citizens are calling for improved quality, accessibility and

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<sup>9</sup> The Doorn Initiative is for the transnational coordination of trade unions in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium.

transparency of services. This includes responding to new and unmet needs, new forms of work organisation, job creation initiatives and continuous change.

Workers in the public services face greater pressures at work and in an environment of rapid change and new pressures and demands; there is a need for improved access to new competencies, learning and skills. The development of e-Government also means that workers need new information and communications technology skills and more competencies. This is particularly important as workers are expected to take on new responsibilities and as governments provide more coordinated and cross-functional work.

For these reasons public services and public service workers can benefit from and develop positively in an environment and culture of lifelong learning. This includes a range of initiatives that value learning as an essential element of working life, whether this be individual competence development or through the concept of a learning organisation.

To reiterate the EPSU-CEMR 1996 Joint Declaration on the Modernisation of Public Services:

“In labour intensive public services, the reorganisation of the work processes and administrative structures are often the main instruments for adapting to the changing environment. This requires a long-term commitment to employment and continuous development of professional skills. Management of change, in particular, demands co-operation between employer and labour in all organisations. Information and interaction are reflective processes where human resources are motivated and channelled for the renewal of working patterns in order to achieve efficient services. The parties stress their continuing striving for reconciling efficiency with a high quality of working life. In an open and secure climate the move toward a learning organisation may be a natural outcome of the adaptation to the continuous change”.

## **5. Employment and employability**

Lifelong learning is important to employability, employment creation and social and territorial cohesion and is a central element of the European Employment Guidelines.

EPSU believes that an effective and active European employment policy should include recognition of the contribution of public services to employment and the importance of lifelong learning to the European Employment Guidelines and Employment Pacts. EPSU welcomes the commitments made under the 2002 Employment Guidelines to lifelong learning, including the role of the social partners in negotiating and agreeing on measures to improve the education and training of adults, and for the setting of targets at Member State level for investment in human resources, education and training.

European Employment Guidelines for 2002 state that:

Member States shall develop comprehensive and coherent strategies for lifelong learning, in order to help people acquire and update the skills needed to cope with economic and social changes throughout the life cycle. In particular, the strategies should cover the development of systems for initial, secondary, and tertiary education, further education and vocational training for young people and adults to improve their employability, adaptability and skills, as well as their participation in the knowledge-based society. Such strategies should articulate the shared responsibility of public authorities, enterprises, the social partners and individuals, and a relevant contribution from civil society, to contribute to the realisation of a knowledge-based society. In this context, the social partners are invited to negotiate and agree on measures to improve further education and training of adults to enhance the adaptability of workers and competitiveness of business. To this end, the Member States should set national targets for an increase in investment in human resources as well as in participation in further education and training (whether formal or informal) and monitor regularly progress towards such targets.

As mentioned earlier, there are also close connections between public service restructuring and the development of the Information Society. This is particularly important regarding the impact of work organisation, job contents, and competence and skills development for workers. Lifelong learning will be critical to ensuring that public service organisations are able to adjust to new and complex challenges.

As a result it is important that guarantees to lifelong learning are set at the European level to ensure that there is access to and leave for education and training within the a model of lifelong learning.

## **6. Working time and learning time**

Lifelong learning is inextricably linked to the organisation of working time, including access to continuous training and re-training, specific training to advance the careers of unskilled workers, skills development and work based learning. Innovative approaches to working time can be developed to facilitate these demands. For these reasons, EPSU stresses the importance of 'time' as a learning resource.

EPSU's research on working time<sup>10</sup> also showed that lifelong learning is an essential element of changes in working time:

...with the pace of change accelerating and the use of new technology growing in the public services, policies on educational leave and lifelong learning have become critical to ensuring that public service workers are able to adapt and update their skills. Although different approaches exist across Europe, developing entitlements to longer leave for education and training purposes is becoming an increasingly important feature of working time policy, acting in some circumstances as a lever and trade off for employers' preferences to working time flexibility, and to provide adaptability to changing labour market demands.

This has been reinforced in EPSU's Working Time Policy Statement<sup>11</sup>, which supports "...a model of lifelong learning, continued access to vocational training, career enhancement and

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<sup>10</sup> Working Time in Europe: A European Working Time Policy in the Public Services, 2000, by Dr Jane Pillinger, ETUI/EPSU: Brussels

<sup>11</sup> EPSU Policy Statement: An Active Working Time Policy: For Employment, Time Sovereignty and Equal Opportunities, 2000

leave opportunities. Increasingly adaptability at work requires a new impetus for training and retraining of workers”.

Reduced working hours, flexible working hours and leave arrangements need to be actively encouraged as a way of ensuring access to lifelong learning and learning time.

There must be adequate staffing levels to compensate for any reduced working hours or leave arrangements for learning. It is essential that all employees have access to learning time, whether this is to undertake work-based learning or to take leave from the labour market for education and training.

Employers must recognise that learning time is an essential pre-requisite to the creation of a culture of learning within organisations. The social partners have a responsibility to negotiate a balance between working time and time for learning.

Examples of this are:

- Time credits for workers whose overtime is credited to a time account which can be used for leave or training.
- Job rotation schemes that can contribute to reducing unemployment.
- Leave schemes that allow workers to take up to a year's leave from the labour market in order to undertake education and training.
- Negotiations for a fixed number of hours of learning time or training that employees are entitled to take. This may or may not be work or skills related. Training time needs to be linked into a broader human resources framework.
- Individual learning accounts, funded by employers, the state and individuals.
- Subsidised education and training leave.

Employers also need to be supported in their efforts to provide lifelong learning, for example through tax breaks or access to government resources for pilot learning projects.

## **7. Work organisation and learning organisations**

New forms of work organisation in the public services result from decentralisation, pressures for more efficiency and responsiveness, new management techniques, and more complex tasks and responsibilities. These have resulted in new working methods, including team working and multi-skilling.

In response to these challenges many public service organisations are developing into learning organisations so that they can be adaptable and responsive to change, new circumstances and to meeting needs in more flexible ways. Learning organisations can help to foster a culture of learning that motivates and supports workers, and recognises their value and worth.

This means that changes in work organisation need to be linked closely to the identification and analysis of training and skills needs from the perspective of both the worker (through individual learning and training plans) and the organisational goals (through training needs analyses and training audits).

A key element of this is the ability of public service organisations to actively support the skills and career development of workers so that they contribute to improving the quality of

services and to meeting user and client expectations. This is good for workers and for the organisations themselves.

Changing work organisation and creating learning organisations must be conducted in partnership with trade unions. The best examples of learning organisations across Europe are those that have created learning partnerships at workplace level for this purpose.

## **8. Equal opportunities**

EPSU believes that a society that values and promotes equality between women and men is also one that recognises that women have the same access to promotion, training and learning as men.

Lifelong learning is very important to the skills and career development of women who have missed out on educational or training opportunities because of their care or domestic responsibilities. Lifelong learning is also a tool for reducing the gender wage gap by ensuring that women have access to better-paid and skilled work. A creative and wide-ranging approach to lifelong learning can also help to value informal, work based or experiential learning carried out by women and thereby improve the value of their work.

The sharing of work and family responsibilities is central to gender equality and in turn can help to improve women's access to lifelong learning by freeing up some of their time. This can be facilitated through leave schemes, career breaks, shorter working hours and more flexibility in working hours for women and men.

This is reinforced in the Joint Declaration of the CEMR Employers Platform and EPSU on Equal Opportunities which states that:

Encouraging and supporting the development of flexible training and development to accommodate and maximise the potential of all employees regardless of mode of employment or family responsibilities. In this regard the development of programmes for vocational education and training would have an important role.

## **9. Enlargement**

The enlargement process poses some significant challenges for trade unions and public service organisations. Lifelong learning can help to assist this process of rapid change by ensuring that the social and economic changes and transitions take place in a socially balanced way.

An EPSU-CEEC seminar in October 2001 highlighted the massive structural changes taking place in local and central government. This includes changes working practices, the decentralisation and privatisation of services and an absence of collective bargaining structures. Lifelong learning was highlighted as being crucially important to this process of change.

The EU must provide support for initiatives that promote new forms of investment and innovation in lifelong learning in the public services in the accession countries in order to ease this transition.

## **10. Widening participation in learning and opening up access to all**

Widening participation in learning for excluded groups and opening up access to all requires new thinking and innovation about how to use existing resources in more creative ways, how to develop new learning methodologies, and how to generate new investment and resources.

In the workplace this means ensuring that all workers have access to lifelong learning including older workers, women, unskilled or low skilled workers, disabled workers, minority ethnic and migrant workers, and those with few qualifications. The benefits of lifelong learning must also be extended to part-time workers, temporary or contract workers.

Learning should not just be provided in workplaces, it should also be provided in local communities as an integral part of local economic and social development. Local learning centres can work in partnership with schools, local employers and other local organisations to foster a culture of local learning.

## **11. Innovation in teaching and learning and valuing skills**

Innovation in teaching and learning will be critical to an inclusive strategy on lifelong learning that opens up access and participation to all. An important component of ensuring that lifelong learning is accessible to all is the way in which learning, formal or informal, is provided and realised. This relates to the recognition that is given to learning, which in turn has implications for how learning is recognised by employers. In addition to formal qualifications and accreditation for learning it is important also to value learning in all contexts including providing for:

- Accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL), so that previous experience and learning (formal and informal) is recognised and valued.
- Transferability and recognition of qualifications
- Valuing and recognising (and accrediting) informal learning in the workplace or in the community, particularly for workers who have lower skill levels

This requires more coordination between the different providers of learning so that there is seamless provision between school learning, work learning, community learning and other formal learning. This requires more flexible approaches, pathways and transitions between different types of educational and training provision, for example, between schools, colleges, universities, workplace and vocational training providers. This can be achieved if systems of accreditation are made more flexible and modular systems of learning are developed with in-built pathways.

The development of new methods for e-learning and distance learning also provide new challenges for learning providers in terms of the quality of e-learning, the methodology used, the skills of tutors and trainers, and the technology infrastructure. It is particularly important to provide training in basic skills and competencies, including ICT skills, as well as more specialised skills and learning.

In the public services, this may mean recognising the skills that existing workers already hold, for example, under-valued skills held by women in the caring sector. It may also highlight the importance of skills and competency development in those areas where the non-provision of training and development has kept down the wages of low paid workers.



## 12. Resources, rights and responsibilities

The responsibility for funding lifelong learning must rest with the state and employers, not the individual worker. Investment in lifelong learning is an investment in human resources and should therefore be funded collectively. However, this does not mean that the individual does not take responsibility for his/her own individual learning.

EPSU supports efforts to enhance individual motivation and responsibility for learning, for example, through individual learning accounts. This is an important outcome of building a culture of learning. However, EPSU also recognises the importance of initiatives that support the widening participation in learning for all. These require resources and investment in lifelong learning and new inclusive and accessible methods for delivering and providing learning. These are responsibilities that lie with the public authorities and employers.

All workers and citizens should have the right to lifelong learning at all stages in the lives.

## 13. Trade union education and training

Many public service unions are themselves providers of education and training and have often been at the forefront of innovations in learning, particularly more flexible and work based forms of learning. In this respect they are integral part of the development of new initiatives in lifelong learning including learning in the following areas:

- Training to build trade union capacity, organisation and effectiveness.
- Activist, officer and membership training to develop negotiating skills, understanding of the law, communication skills, equal opportunities etc. in order to participate more effectively in the social dialogue and collective bargaining.
- Learning to learn and basic skills training for lower skilled workers in order to enhance their skills and career development.
- Pathways of learning developed in partnership with colleges and universities that open up possibilities for part-time, open and distance education for union members, particularly at third level.
- Systems of accreditation that place a value on trade union education and training.

EPSU recognises the significance of trade union education and training as a tool for trade union capacity and effectiveness. It has provided resources for education and training through the EPSU education modules *Promoting Quality Public Services for Europe's Citizens*, as well as providing transnational courses for public service union members and training officers in partnership with the European Trade Union College. This role is particularly important in the context of Enlargement and in supporting the training of union members and officers in the accession countries.

## 14. Recommendations

EPSU believes that lifelong learning should be the right of all workers and citizens. This means that all learning should be valued and be made available to all citizens throughout their lives from pre-school years to post-retirement.

EPSU believes that lifelong learning should be an essential part of the collective bargaining agenda. **EPSU affiliates will aim for a target of ten days/year leave for individual developments.** The following principles of lifelong learning should be achieved through

collective agreements between representative employers' and trade union organisations, at local, regional, national and European levels:

- a) Rights to collective bargaining and recognition of unions in this process should form the basis on a lifelong learning strategy; lifelong learning should be the subject of collective agreements.
- b) The social partners should play an active role in shaping developments in lifelong learning.
- c) Lifelong learning should be seen as an integral part of an overall strategy on employment, the modernisation of public services and equal opportunities.
- d) Workers should have the right to receive individual learning accounts and access to continuous education, training and lifelong learning. This should include task specific or job-related training, transferable skills training and personal development training.
- e) All learning should be valued and recognised, formal and informal. Where possible this should lead to a recognised vocational qualification.
- f) Employers and governments have the principal responsibility for funding lifelong learning.
- g) Employers and governments must give proper investment in terms of time and resources for learning. This should include health and safety training for all employees.
- h) Lifelong learning should be rooted in principles of inclusion, equal opportunities and participation for all. **Elderly workers should have equal access to life-long learning possibilities.**
- i) New innovations, learning methodologies and provision should shape the future development of lifelong learning.
- j) Existing learning programmes, both individual and those for organisations, should be regularly assessed.**

EPSU will strive to:

- a) Support the further development of the 'Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications' between the social partners at the inter-sectoral level and ensure that it is relevant to the public services.
- b) Advocate and promote the importance of lifelong learning in the sectoral social dialogue. EPSU will ensure that the social partners in the public services play an active role in lifelong learning, in supporting and developing initiatives to improve employability, the development of the knowledge-based economy, as well as broader objectives related to citizenship, equality and inclusion.
- c) Share good practice of innovations in lifelong learning in the public services with a view to promoting lifelong learning of the highest quality.
- d) Promote trade union education and training and provide education materials and support to public service trade unions undertaking trade union education programmes related to European integration.

*Second draft, Jane Pillinger, Dublin, April, 2002*

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