

RISING EXPECTATIONS / *VERS DE NOUVEAUX HORIZONS*
NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR THE LOW-SKILLED /
AMÉLIORER LES COMPÉTENCES DES TRAVAILLEURS PEU QUALIFIÉS

**International conference organised by the OECD LEED Programme
and the Danish Ministries of Education and Employment,
in co-operation with the European Commission**

Copenhagen, 18 June 2004

AGENDA

Today, many workers have difficulty retaining their job and progressing in the labour market due to inadequate skills and qualifications. They are particularly vulnerable to structural change, whereby jobs are continuously being created in high-technology sectors while low-skilled production is increasingly being transferred to emerging economies. Despite a growing need to train the workforce and general support being vowed to lifelong learning, industrialised countries may have spent insufficient attention to the low-skilled. A key question therefore is whether a more strategic approach should now be taken.

As an OECD report recently showed, few national policies exist to upgrade the skills of the low-qualified workers re-integrating the labour market after a spell of long-term unemployment or of those workers “trapped” in relatively insecure and low-paid jobs. In most countries, there is a gap between the action taken by the public employment service, responsible for re-integrating the unemployed on the labour market, and the services offered by training institutions, which address the needs of qualified workers mainly. The report also found that many of the initiatives seeking to fill this gap are located and managed at local level. These initiatives are often led by local authorities, trade unions, community-based organisations and partnerships and seek a better articulation between the labour demand and skills needs. In the light of this evidence, the LEED Committee decided to launch a study to examine the nature of the initiatives implemented at local level, the role that they play in broader area-based economic and employment development strategies, and to discuss their relative success and limitations. Five countries are participating in the project: Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The purpose of this conference is to contribute to this agenda through an examination of the key instruments and partnerships put in place and through a discussion of possible ways to improve local practices in this public policy area. Exchange of views will take place among the main stakeholders (policy-makers, practitioners, employers, trade unions) to feed the analytical work of the OECD. The findings of the LEED Study so far will be made available as a background for discussion, and all the researchers and LEED Delegates involved will be participating in the discussion.

Registration: 8:00 – 9:00

Chair: **Jan Hendeliowitz**, Vice-Chairman of the LEED Committee and Director of the Public Employment Service in Storstrøm, Denmark.

Opening session

9:00 – 9:20 Welcome: **Henrik Nepper-Christensen**, Permanent Secretary to the Danish Ministry of Education.
Sergio Arzeni, Head of the LEED Programme.

9:20 – 9:30 The main issues emerging from the Study on Skills Upgrading, by **Sylvain Giguère**, Deputy Head of the LEED Programme

9:30 – 10:45 Session one: The challenges of increasing workers skills in the 21st century

This opening session will seek to answer the following questions:

- Why are today's workforce skills inadequate to respond to labour market needs?
- What are the major obstacles and challenges (social, economic, political) facing the training and skills development of low-qualified workers?
- Why should skills-upgrading be a priority for governments and what can be done?

Introduction and moderation by Ewart Keep, Deputy Director, SKOPE, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom.

Panel: **Robert Strauss**, Head of Unit of the Employment Strategy, *DG Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission*, Brussels, Belgium.

Villy Hovard Pedersen, Director of Adult Education and Training, *Danish Ministry of Education*.

Kenneth Kerr, Director General, Active Employment Measures, *Human Resources and Skills Development*, Canada.

10:45 – 11:15 Coffee break

11:15 – 13:00 Session two: The instruments of public intervention

The second session, participants will examine the nature and relevance of specific *tools and instruments* that have been implemented to respond to the problems and challenges discussed in Session One. The questions to be addressed will be as follows:

- What type of courses are the most appropriate for the low-qualified workers (nature and duration of courses, motivational aspects, basic skills vs. vocational training)?
- What are the best tools to meet employers' needs (according to sectors and size)?
- What type of financing arrangements are the most adequate?

*Introduction by **Penny Tamkin** (moderator), Senior Researcher, Institute for Employment Studies (IES, Brighton) and **Mette Noerholm**, Researcher, Danish Institute of Technological Research, who will present highlights from the case studies in the UK and Denmark.*

Panel: **Annie Fouquet**, Director, *DARES, Ministère des Affaires Sociales, du Travail et de la Solidarité*, France and OECD ELSAC Chair.

Johan van Rens, Director of the *European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)*.

Carlos Gonzalo, Director of the *Public Employment Service, La Rioja*, Spain.

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch break

Afternoon sessions

14:00 – 15:45 Session three: The institutional arrangements of public intervention

This session will seek to locate public intervention in terms of its relevance within a broad framework towards adult education and employment promotion. It will explore the coordinating mechanisms set up at various institutional scales and in various institutional settings, and identify the role of each actor. More specifically, the following questions will be addressed:

- How to identify the beneficiaries, to monitor their progression in the labour market and to anticipate future skills needs in the labour market? Is there any role for the public employment service, the trade unions, the employers?
- Is there enough administrative flexibility in the management of programmes to meet the needs of the employers and employees? Is the policy framework (adult education, labour market) easy to understand and use?
- Is there a need for pro-active steps to be taken regionally and in the enterprises?
- What are the partnerships needed in the regions and in the enterprises? Are grassroots organisations and social partners drawn into the policy design and delivery?

*Introduction by **Randall Eberts** (moderator), Director, *W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research* and **Ides Nicaise**, *Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA)*, Leuven, Belgium, who will present highlights from the case studies in the US and Belgium.*

Panel: **Anita Flores**, Executive Director, *the Jane Addams Resource Corporation*, Chicago, United States.

Mike Campbell, Head of Policy and Research, Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), United Kingdom.

Henrik Bach Mortensen, Director, *the Danish Employers' Confederation (DA)*, Denmark.

15:45 – 16:15 Coffee break

16:15 – 17:30 Session four: To act now: what lessons? A debate

This final session will draw lessons from the debates and seek to answer the following questions:

- What is to be done now to move ahead on the skills upgrading agenda?
- What are the main instruments to put in place, what are the main partnerships to activate?
- How can the OECD best help to tackle this issue?

Introduction and moderation by Ron Saunders, Senior Researcher, Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN).

Panel: **Tine Auervig-Huggenberger**, Vice-president, *the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions*, Denmark.

Bernard Brunhes, Director, *Bernard Brunhes Consultants*, Paris, France.

Colin Crouch, Chairman of the Department of Social and Political Sciences, *European University Institute*, Florence, Italy.

Paolo Garonna, Head of Research, *Confindustria*, Italy.

17:30 Concluding remarks by **John Martin**, Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD.