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EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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THEMATIC REVIEW ON ADULT LEARNING

HIGHLIGHTS, EMERGING ISSUES AND LESSONS TO DATE

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English - Or. English

NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT

1. The Thematic Review on Adult Learning was launched by the Education Committee at its meeting in November 1998 [DEELSA/ED(98)13]. The proposal for the Review was also discussed by the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee at its meeting in March 1999 and it requested that the Thematic Review be carried out as a joint undertaking of the two Committees. National representatives met in Paris on 16-17 June 1999 to discuss the revised proposed terms of reference [DEELSA/ED/WD(99)9/REV1] and to indicate interest in participating in the Thematic Review. A new version of the terms of reference taking into account their comments was presented to both Committees in Autumn 1999 [DEELSA/ED/WD(99)10].
2. Nine countries (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) confirmed their commitment to participate in the activity and will have been visited by the end of November 2001 (eight have been visited so far). Country background reports and country notes are posted on the Thematic Review web site as soon as they are finalised.
3. A Progress Report that included a brief background of the activity, a summary of project developments since the launching of the activity, the main themes of the review and preliminary lessons from key features of adult learning systems observed in the countries reviewed at that time was presented and discussed at the Autumn 2000 Education Committee and Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee meetings [DEELSA/ELSA/ED(2000)1].
4. The Comparative Report is the final output of the activity. It will identify main trends and policy issues, analyse policy options and approaches and evaluate policy lessons and options that can be regarded as “good practices” in the pursuit of adult learning policies. A full draft of the Comparative Report will be presented at the Spring 2002 meetings of the Education Committee and the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.
5. The purpose of this document is to give the Committees an indication of the emerging issues that will shape the Comparative Report and offer an overview of its content so as to receive feed back for the final draft. No attempt has been made at this stage to achieve a consistent editorial style, task that will be done for the final Report. The first part presents an annotated outline of the Comparative Report. The second part analyses some emerging issues that have become apparent from the review visits.
6. The Committee is invited to
 - **NOTE** the developments to date; and
 - **COMMENT** on the two parts to offer feedback for the Comparative Report.

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THEMATIC REVIEW ON ADULT LEARNING
HIGHLIGHTS, EMERGING ISSUES AND LESSONS TO DATE

INTRODUCTION

Objectives and organisation of the thematic review

1. When they met in January 1996, OECD Education Ministers argued that far-reaching changes were needed to make lifelong learning for all a reality. “Strategies for lifelong learning need a wholehearted commitment to new system-wide goals, standards and approaches, adapted to the culture and circumstance of each country.” Recognising that adults encountered particular problems in participating in lifelong learning, Ministers called on the OECD to “Review and explore new forms of teaching and learning appropriate for adults, whether employed, unemployed or retired.” In October 1997, OECD Labour Ministers amplified the message. They recognised the adverse labour market consequences that arise due to the lack of access to lifelong learning opportunities, and “underlined the importance of ensuring that lifelong learning opportunities are broadly accessible to all persons of working age, in order to sustain and increase their employability”.

2. In 1998, the OECD and the US Department of Education co-organised an international conference, *How Adults Learn*, to Review recent research results and practices with regard to teaching and learning adapted to the needs of adults (OECD and US Department of Education, 1999). One of the conclusions from the Washington Conference was that a cross-country Thematic Review may be a valuable tool for identifying and analysing the lessons from different national experiences with adult learning, and understanding how the policy and institutional environment might be made more supportive of adult learning. At the end of 1998, the OECD Education Committee launched this Thematic Review of Adult Learning as an activity conducted jointly with the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.

3. The purpose of the activity is to analyse policy options in the field of adult learning in different contexts. This will be done by reviewing whether the learning opportunities for adults are adequate, how adults’ access to and participation in education and training can be improved and how learning responds to the labour market. The other issues analysed are as follows: patterns of participation and non-participation in adult learning; diagnoses of the problems that arise because of these patterns; policy programmes and institutional arrangements that have been used by Member countries, expanding learning opportunities for

adults; and options that can be regarded as “good practices” under diverse institutional circumstances and how these can be applied more widely within and across countries.

4. A meeting of national representatives was held in June 1999 in Paris to discuss the proposed terms of reference and identify the countries interested in participating. After this meeting, nine countries chose to participate in the Review: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. A team composed of three experts, including a rapporteur, from different countries and with varied backgrounds (such as education, economics and the social sciences) and two members of the OECD Secretariat visit each country. Each visit lasts some ten days and enables the five experts to study both education and labour market issues. Each country prepares a Background Report drafted on the basis of terms of reference agreed to by the country’s representatives and the OECD Secretariat.

5. The country visit allows the five experts to analyse adult learning on the basis of the background report, discussions with representatives of the government, the administration, employers, trade unions and education professionals and through field visits. After each visit, the rapporteur, assisted by the rest of the team, prepares a country note analysing the main problems posed by adult learning and the measures taken to solve them. This note is organised on the basis of four broad themes targeting the problems that make it difficult for adults to participate in lifelong learning activities: inadequate incentives and motivations for adults to learn; complex pathways between learning settings and a lack of transparency in signalling learning outcomes across a variety of formal and non-formal settings; inappropriate teaching and learning methods; and, a lack of co-ordination between various public policies that directly or indirectly affect lifelong learning. A final Comparative Report will address the various issues examined and will present the possible policy responses in a comparative perspective on the basis of the information gathered in the participating countries.

Summary of developments

6. As of November 2001, the Secretariat will have completed the first round of the Thematic Review with nine country visits: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

7. The Thematic Review web site contains most of the documents that are being produced for the review. It is updated continuously when the documents are ready. For each country visited, it includes a background report and a country note approved by country authorities, the programme of the visit, and a listing of the expert team and of the steering group. It also includes a progress report and five Thematic Review newsletters.

8. In relation to participating countries, Spain volunteered to join the activity in January 2001. In July 2001, the United States withdrew from the first round of the Thematic Review. Due to calendar problems Hungary has become the first country to participate in the likely second round of the Review.

Contents of the document

9. This document presents the general framework of what will be the final Comparative Report on the Thematic Review on Adult Learning. The Comparative Report is the culminating synthesis report from the activity. It will identify main trends and policy issues, analyse policy options and approaches and evaluate policy lessons and options that can be regarded as “good practices” in the pursuit of adult learning policies. It will draw on country background reports, country notes and other relevant material, such as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), Labour Force Surveys (LFS), data provided by countries and

other material gathered from country visits and research. A full draft of the Comparative Report will be presented at the Spring 2002 meetings of the Education Committee and the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee.

10. A draft outline of the structure and annotated description of the content of the Comparative Report is presented here, as Part I of this document, with two objectives in mind. First, it would be important to receive feedback from the Committees at an early stage, before the structure and main directions of the content of the Comparative Report are finalised. Secondly, it provides a useful context to the Committees for reviewing Part II of this document, which is work in progress and provides some highlights and emerging issues gathered from the Thematic Review so far.

PART I – DRAFT OUTLINE FOR THE COMPARATIVE REPORT

1. Structure of the Comparative Report

- **Executive Summary** will provide a brief overview of the main findings of the report.
- **Chapter 1. Introduction** will offer background information on the Thematic Review.
- **Chapter 2. Why adult learning?** This chapter will provide the definitions and framework for the review and the rationale for the focus on adult learning.
- **Chapter 3. Patterns of participation and provision** will identify patterns of participation in adult learning and assess the needs and gaps in provision.
- **Chapter 4. Overview of country approaches** will provide a summary of the general policies and priorities currently underway in adult learning in the 9 countries which participated in the Thematic Review.
- **Chapter 5. Strengthening the incentives and motivation to learn** will analyse different practices that can enhance incentives and motivation for participation in learning in different areas.
- **Chapter 6. Delivering quality and diversified provision** will examine measures that can improve the quality of learning and outcomes through the use of appropriate pedagogy, modes of learning provision, teacher preparation and quality insurance.
- **Chapter 7. Promoting an integrated approach to the delivery of adult learning** will analyse policy options to address problems of fragmented provision of services and inadequacies of delivery infrastructures.
- **Chapter 8. Key findings and future directions** will provide a general overview of findings, key elements and features of a desirable adult learning system and challenges for the future.

- **Annexes.** All the documents describing the Thematic Review or providing further statistical description or tools will be presented in annexes.

2. Annotated Outline of the Comparative Report

Executive Summary

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Thematic Review analyses adult learning policy options under different national contexts. It reviews the adequacy of learning opportunities and examines options for improving access, participation, quality and effectiveness of adult learning.

1.1. The scope of the Thematic Review?

The analysis covers the following areas: the patterns of participation in adult learning; diagnosis of the problems that arise because of these patterns; policies, programmes and institutional arrangements that have been used by participating countries to expand learning opportunities for adults; options that can be regarded as “good practices” under diverse institutional circumstances and how these can be applied more widely within and across countries.

1.2. Structure of the Comparative Report

This section will provide a summary and rationale for the different chapters of the Comparative Report. It highlights the need for action to address four key and interrelated objectives: how to improve incentives and strengthen motivation to learn; how to provide learning that is most appropriate to the needs of learners; how to integrate different forms of provision so that all learning needs are addressed; and how to develop and implement a coherent and effective set of policies.

Chapter 2. Why the focus on adult learning?

This chapter will discuss definitions and types of adult learning. It will also discuss different motives for adult learning - economic, social, and personal development – and analyse their rationale and importance for policy development.

2.1. Definitions of adult learning

How do different countries define adult learners? In order to achieve consistency for the data presented in the Thematic Review, the reference group will be adults aged 25 to 64 years who have left initial education and training. However, as countries have different definitions for those who are considered adults, this section will review the differences.

2.2. *Types of adult learning*

This section will survey the different types of adult learning, such as literacy and adult basic education, upper secondary education, IT literacy, education for migrants, vocational education, on-the job training or other types of formal, informal and non-formal education or learning for leisure.

2.3. *Rationale for adult learning*

Adults participate in learning activities for a variety of reasons. Some learning is of an investment nature and some of a consumption nature, although it is often not easy to separate the two motives. Hence, the rationale for some adult learning can be found in terms of economic returns, while for others there may be social benefits (such as better health, better citizenship) and and/or other non-monetary benefits such as personal development. This section will offer an overview of research findings on the costs and benefits of different types of adult learning. It will use the human and social capital approaches to review the impact of education and training on economic growth and social wellbeing and the question of under- or over-investment in adult education and training.

Chapter 3. Patterns of access and provision: assessing needs and priorities

This chapter will discuss the patterns and main trends in adult learning within the broader context of economic, political, social and demographic trends in the participating countries.

3.1. *Economic, social and demographic trends*

This section will examine the role broader economic, social, and demographic trends play in shaping the need for adult learning. It will focus on issues such as labour force participation, employment and unemployment rates, educational attainment and literacy levels of adult populations and ageing pressures.

3.2. *Patterns of access and participation*

This section will use a variety of data sources (such as IALS, EAG, ALMP, LFS), including the data gathered specifically for the Thematic Review, to provide an overview of the demand side, including patterns of participation in adult learning in terms of the volume, distribution, quality and cost of adult learning. It will offer data, wherever possible, on participation by age, gender, employment situation, educational attainment, literacy levels and type of training.

3.3. *Types of provision*

This section will present the diversity of provision on the supply side and the role of different providers and actors. It will survey the different types of providers, such as private providers (including firms), community-based and public providers. It will also underline the importance of provision other than the traditional formal ones and the development of new providers in distance education and e-learning.

3.4. *Gaps in provision*

This section will assess the existing patterns of access and provision in terms of the unmet learning needs and what are the priorities for meeting different type of needs.

Chapter 4. *Overview of country policy approaches*

This chapter will provide a summary of the general policies and priorities with respect to adult learning in those countries participating in the Thematic Review.

4.1. *General policy patterns across countries*

This section will draw upon the country background reports and country notes to assess the priorities, as expressed in legislation, institutional arrangements and policy statements.

4.2. *Resources and financing issues*

This section will review general financing trends and arrangements across countries. It will draw on information from the OECD activity on financing lifelong learning.

4.3. *Policy design and implementation*

This section will study the role of institutional and management mechanisms in the design and implementation of adult learning policies. Co-ordination and collaboration mechanisms of different policy actors across countries will be reviewed. It will also examine the challenges posed by the need to balance national and regional policies and recent trends towards decentralisation.

Chapter 5. *Strengthening the incentives and motivation to learn*

Weak incentives to invest in learning and low motivation are key barriers to participation in adult learning. This chapter examines the steps that government, the social partners, other actors involved in adult learning and the potential learners themselves can take to overcome these barriers. The chapter will draw upon observations from the countries visited to describe the circumstances and conditions under which some of the country approaches have proved to be more effective than others, thereby warranting the label “good practice”. Three areas will be covered: basic adult education, employment related training and public training programmes.

5.1. *Basic adult education*

This section will explore policies and practices to improve incentives and strengthen motivation for participation in adult basic education. The differing circumstances of different categories of learners will be examined to identify the reasons why some participate and others do not. This analysis will be used to identify the level of basic education required (upper secondary level, literacy, host-country language as a second language, basic skills, NTIC skills, etc.), and the types of incentives that can counteract barriers to participation.

5.2. *Employment related training*

This section will analyse a number of measures for enhancing training opportunities, particularly for on-the-job training:

- At the establishment/firm level: a tax levy/training subsidy, an award for particularly progressing companies, assessment and recognition of learning outcomes or other financial incentives.
- At the worker level: individualised learning accounts (ILAs), schemes for the assessment of competencies, entitlements to subsidised study leave, loan schemes, time-life portfolios or part-time contracts to allow the pursuit of further studies.
- At the sectoral level by social partners: framework agreements on education and training, setting targets for continuing training based on best practices.

This section will also discuss how joint involvement of the key stakeholders – firms, workers, social partners and policy makers – is important to sustain a high skilled route and breaking up the low skills trap.

5.3. *Public training programmes*

This section will deal with variation across countries in the level of public spending and the numbers of participants in public training programmes for employed and unemployed adults, derived from the OECD database on labour market programmes. It will offer an evaluation of recent public training programmes in the participating countries.

The different possible effects of such policies — displacement, dead weight, retention, motivation or upgrading effects — will be examined in the light of the flexibility with which unemployment, job search and learning can be combined. Evaluations of recent public training programmes in the participating countries will be presented.

Chapter 6. *Delivering quality and diversified provision*

This chapter will examine measures that can improve the quality of learning and outcomes through the use of a diversity of pedagogical methods, modes of learning provision, teacher preparation and quality insurance.

6.1. *Designing appropriate curriculums*

Unlike for young people, attending learning sessions is typically more difficult for adults. If the sessions fail to prove useful immediately to adults, the drop-out rate may be large. Learning should captivate the adults in order to avoid having to “capture and hold” them.

6.2. *Choosing the right mix of formal and informal learning*

This section will discuss the definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

6.3 *Relevant pedagogy*

This section will review all the teaching and training methods encountered in the visited countries and try to assess the respective value of each. It will also investigate the relevance of different systems and tools such as the modular system, the use of the new information and communication technologies and distance learning.

6.4 *Qualifications of teachers and trainers*

Very few countries have demonstrated a willingness to set up specific programmes for trainers or teachers of adults. This section will deal with the limited evidence available that suggests teaching adults may require specific skills and therefore adequate preparation to do so.

It will also analyse the impact of the teachers and trainers on the learning process. It will look at what they can do to reach potential learners and to improve the achievement of adult learners.

6.5 *Ensuring quality*

Quality assurance has proven to be one of the least consensual issues in a number of countries visited. Some countries have chosen a minimalist system, in order to not penalise the small structures providing education and training. Other still hang on to the existing systems (*e.g.* ISO). In almost all countries, several systems co-exist. This section will try to disentangle the issue and list the pros and the cons of the different systems.

6.6 *Recognising learning*

It is important that adults are not required to start from scratch when they are willing to learn. This section will address the numerous questions arising from the need to recognise prior learning or acquired skills where they have not been certified one way or another. Current learning must also be certified adequately for two reasons: i) so that the acquired skills/qualifications can be used as an entry point for future learning (internal value, or currency of the certificate) and ii) so that individuals have their new skills/qualifications valued in the labour market or within their enterprise (external value).

Furthermore, some major companies (mainly high-technology businesses) and some organisations (such as the European Union *Computer Driver License*) deliver, or at least acknowledge, private certification. This section will address this issue and assess how certification systems might evolve to cope with it.

6.7 *Linking learning to individual successful outcomes*

Since the focus of the Thematic Review is on learning in a broad sense, this section will try to analyse the different country experiences and good practices that link learning to broader outcomes, be it economic, social or personal. For the learning provision associated with the enterprises, it will focus largely on the labour market outcomes such as promotions, better wages or enhanced mobility on the external labour market.

Chapter 7. An integrated approach to the provision of, and participation in, adult learning

This chapter analyses policy options to address problems of fragmented provision of services and inadequacies of delivery infrastructures.

7.1. Articulation between providers: the adult learning market

This section will deal with the functioning of the adult education and training market in the participating countries: Is it integrated or fragmented? Is it supply or demand-driven? What is its degree of transparency? Are the competencies or skills acquired transferable? Is external mobility facilitated? Different possible relationships between providers will be studied including: partnership, co-operation/competition, and barriers against new providers. The role of government will be addressed, noting its variation from a monopolistic situation in some countries to the role of provider of last resort in others.

7.2. New directions for guidance, counselling and support services

Guidance and counselling services are important to reach would-be learners. This section will analyse the activities of existing agencies and institutions dealing with guidance and counselling services for potential learners and employers, covering new opportunities and needs, the documentation of formal and non-formal competency needs, skills and competencies assessments. It will also analyse the potential role of comprehensive information systems for adult learners and would-be learners (with special attention to reaching out to the disadvantaged), involving employers, training institutions and national policy makers.

A further aspect to be considered is the necessity of collateral support services such as transportation, child-care services, health services and peer-support groups. This section will assess typical challenges, including insufficient resources, lack of co-ordination and the ways in which they have been met by the participating countries in the Review.

7.3. Towards a holistic approach in adult learning?

This section will analyse the slow shift towards a more unified concept of adult learning. It will review some of the specific policy measures geared towards adult learning. It will also examine a number of different factors that can contribute to promote a systemic approach, such as lifelong learning policies, national qualification systems or individual learning accounts, among others.

Chapter 8. Key findings and future directions

This chapter will provide a general overview of findings, key elements of a desirable adult learning system and challenges for the future. It will offer conclusions on what can be considered coherent adult learning policies in different countries.

Annexes

1. List of experts and national co-ordinators

2. Key data for participating countries

This annex presents contextual economic, employment and demographic information on understanding adult learning and supports Chapter 4.

3. Adult learning profiles by country

This annex presents the main features of adult education systems in each country in a comparable systematic fashion. It will provide background, current structure and present developments in adult learning in each Thematic Review participating country.

4. Country codes used in tables and figures.

PART II — SOME ADULT LEARNING ISSUES

1. Motivations and incentives for adults to learn

11. The first set of issues targeted by the Thematic Review on Adult Learning concerns the motivations and incentives for adults to learn. Although the initial motivations of learners are no doubt unambiguous — they always know why they are beginning — once they have completed their education or training, it becomes increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between those who underwent training for personal reasons or employment-related reasons¹. This is all the more true as time passes and individuals rationalise their past decisions in the light of more recent events. The situation is far more complex than a clear-cut dichotomy between personal and employment-related goals, for training undertaken for personal reasons may well lead to a new job or to a change in professional orientation. Similarly, employers may need to train their staff in basic reading when introducing new machines that require workers to have adequate reading skills in their own language in order to follow instructions. However, since the needs of employers and of the labour market in general are more specific and often better defined, the incentives and motivations of learners with specifically employment-related aims will be addressed separately in Section 1.2.

12. This is why Section 1.1. is focused on the broad segment of adult learning that concerns those needs that are not directly employment related. The Comparative Report that will follow this document

1. To simplify, we shall use the term of general education in the former case and vocational training in the latter.

will present a much fuller and more homogeneous set of findings and analytical conclusions. In the meantime, the following pages provide what can be considered as a general framework for analysis.

1.1. *Covering general education needs – A challenge to be met*

1.1.1. *Those in need of training are unaware of this fact...or refuse to admit it*

13. It might well seem that the logical starting point for discussing adults' learning needs would be to identify adults' aspirations in this regard. Part of the literature on education and andragogy² clearly explains the necessity of having adult learners create their own learning project or at least of helping them to define the goal of their learning activity (project-based education³). Without denying the validity of this work, this section will start from an even more elementary premise about which there is a good deal of consensus, i.e. that there are certain basic needs that are not necessarily connected with any personal or employment-related plans or specific project, since individuals are not necessarily aware of these needs — in fact, we know that they rarely are. One of the arguments that will be defended herein is that some needs have nothing to do with any kind of project and are simply necessary to function in the countries covered by the Thematic Review (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000). We can imagine a wide variety of situations in which good reading skills and basic quantitative skills are vital (such as reading the instructions on a fire extinguisher during a fire or the directions for the dosage of a drug to be administered to a small child). Without resorting to such drastic examples, we can think of many situations in which adults simply need to have basic skills, outside any concrete project, even though they may not have anticipated or be aware of these needs. The following section will seek to show that these basic needs are not always recognised as such by all adults. It should also be borne in mind that all of Section 1.2 will be devoted to learning for employment-related purposes — in which the concept of project will be relevant — and that the Comparative Report will deal with issues of andragogy in greater detail⁴.

14. Describing the motivations for adults to learn is one of the difficult challenges of the Thematic Review on Adult Learning. It is in fact a two-fold task, for although it is of course necessary to describe the motivations of learners, it is also essential to understand why some people with learning needs are not participating in learning. However, in this latter case, information and data sources are relatively scarce, precisely because the institutions in charge of adult education and training have little contact with this public. Furthermore, the experts had relatively few opportunities to meet with adults who cannot or do not wish to learn during their visits to the nine countries covered by the Thematic Review.

15. The problem is partly one of data collection, admittedly, but it no doubt goes even deeper than that, for we know that the adults most in need of education and training are also those who refuse most strongly to acknowledge that this is the case. For example, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) shows that the individuals at the bottom of the literacy scale constructed for the survey (Levels 1 and 2) frequently do not think that they need training (Table 1.1): at prose literacy Level 1 — prose literacy being the criterion that most closely matches reading proficiency — more of them reply that their reading skills are “excellent” (12.88%) than “poor” (10.62%); at level 2 of this same prose scale, 80.77% state that they have “good” or “excellent” reading ability. Consequently, it appears that many adults overestimate their real ability to understand a text and react appropriately and make adequate decisions on the basis of what they read. Similarly, of those who think that they have “excellent” reading skills, 26.12% are at Level 1 or

2. Adult education.

3. For example, see Chiousse (2001).

4. See Part I for a detailed outline of the forthcoming Comparative Report.

2 on the prose scale, or almost as many people who actually are at Level 4 or 5 (31.02%). Individuals' lack of objectivity about their reading level — and further data in other areas show that the situation is much the same for their writing and quantitative skills — is even more flagrant for those who say that they have good skills: half are at level 1 or 2, as opposed to barely 13% at level 4 or 5 (Table 1.2⁵).

Table 1.1. **Respondents' self-assessment of their reading skills according to their prose literacy level**

	Excellent	Good	Moderate	Poor	NSP/RR	% by row
Level 1	12.88*	33.18	33.13	10.62	10.2	16.54
Level 2	32.68	48.09	16.33	0.93	1.98	28.24
Level 3	51.52	39.95	6.37	0.37	1.8	36.18
Level 4	69.45	27.16	2.10	0.06	1.22	17.27
Level 5	84.29	15.25	0.10	0.00	0.37	1.77
% by column	43.48	38.48	12.76	2.16	3.12	100/100

* I.e., 12.88 % of the respondents ranked at Level 1 on the Prose scale consider their reading skills to be excellent.

Source : IALS (processed by authors)

Table 1.2. **Respondents' prose literacy level according to their self-assessment of their reading skills**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	% by row
Excellent	4.90*	21.22	42.86	27.59	3.43	43.48
Good	14.26	35.29	37.56	12.19	0.70	38.48
Moderate	42.95	36.14	18.05	2.85	0.01	12.76
Poor	81.26	12.09	6.16	0.48	0.00	2.16
% by column	16.54	28.24	36.18	17.27	1.77	100/96.88 ⁶

* I.e., 4,90 % of the respondents who consider their reading skills to be excellent are classified at Level 1 on the Prose scale.

Source : IALS (processed by authors)

16. The IALS survey makes it possible to take this part of the diagnosis of adult learning needs a step further, for it also appears that the individuals most in need of training and education do not believe that their lack of basic skills hinders their career advancement or their ability to change jobs. Of those who say that they are not at all limited in their opportunities for promotion or mobility at work, 40.15 % are at level 1 or 2, as opposed to only 21.22% at level 4 or 5 (Table 1.3).

5. All tables provided in this document will be presented in chart form in the final document.

6. Some individuals did not wish to respond the self-assessment question or were unable to do so (3.12%).

Table 1.3. **Prose literacy level by response to the question on whether their reading skills limit their opportunities at work**

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	% by row
Greatly limiting	55.69*	21.97	19.53	2.75	0.06	2.29
Moderately limiting	39.73	37.85	18.98	3.39	0.05	9.10
Not at all limiting	12.76	27.39	38.63	19.20	2.01	87.66
% by column	16.54	28.24	36.18	17.27	1.77	100/99.05 ⁷

* I.e., 55.69 % of respondents who consider that their reading abilities limit their opportunities at work greatly are at level 1 on the Prose scale.

Source : IALS (processed by authors)

17. These data, although convergent, must admittedly be used cautiously since they raise a number of complex issues, in particular regarding the literature on individuals' self-assessment of their own performance⁸. It is also clear that there are many explanations for the second set of results on opportunities at work (Table 1.3), the most obvious of which concerns skill profiles. Naturally enough, the least skilled individuals are also those who hold jobs that require the fewest skills, and thus they are not necessarily aware of their lack of skills. Above all, if we extrapolate, this means that they are the least likely to seek career advancement, since many of them say that they do not suffer from any handicap in this respect. It might be tempting to dismiss this as a tautology if we did not also know the impact that raising the skill level has on economic growth, individual well-being and on a series of parameters ranging from citizenship to integration into society.

18. The first set of results (Tables 1.1 and 1.2) is interesting because it shows that there is no natural, spontaneous demand for government initiatives to raise basic skills (such as reading and writing skills) on the part of the natural target populations of such initiatives. This fact, which was established directly by the IALS survey, was also confirmed by a series of field observations conducted during the Thematic Review visits⁹. During the interviews with the expert teams, many educators and field staff in all the countries visited said that people who are known to need remedial education in their own language are unwilling even to consider this possibility, for a whole series of reasons that it was not possible to identify in the Thematic Review.

19. These observations also highlight the necessity of explaining correctly to adults in need of education the benefits that they can derive from improving their skills. It is also necessary to develop a sound system of incentives. Lastly, it is of considerable interest to observe the differences across countries (Table 1.4). Obviously, the number of adult learners is very unevenly distributed and if there is a cultural dimension to learning or wanting to learn, it is to some extent borne out by these results by country. The interesting question in this case is not so much how countries compare, but rather how long it will take them to change the attitudes of their respective populations. Although there can be no precise answer to this question, let us posit that if the attitudes of the populations with the greatest adult learning needs can be changed in a relatively reasonable time — in less than a decade, for example — then the policy to be

7. Some individuals did not wish to respond the question on job limitations or were unable to do so (0.95%).

8. For example, the fact that individuals do not think that their possibilities of being promoted or of finding a new job are limited by their poor reading skills is not necessarily due to a lack of lucidity about themselves, since one-third of them recognise that their reading skills are poor, but still do not think that this limits their opportunities at work. It simply means that the job they hold only requires a low level of basic skills or that the individuals themselves have no career ambition.

9. It is also widely referred to in the literature on this topic.

implemented will surely not be the same as if one is targeting the long or very long term; it is therefore important to think in terms of the time frame into which the initiatives must fit.

20. For example, the tradition of reading in Sweden, which arose from the fact that young people who wanted to get married had to be able to read the Bible, is very old, and developed over the long term. It can be mentioned in passing that the tradition of writing is much less strong in Sweden, which shows clearly that nothing about a learning culture is predetermined or automatic, but is always the outcome of a coherent and persuasive system of incentives. Lastly, another explanation regularly given for Sweden's strong performance on literacy tests (and the IALS survey in particular) is the fact that foreign films shown there are always in the original version with Swedish subtitles, which means that Swedes who want to understand these films must be able to read the subtitles in their own language (not to mention the incentives for learning foreign languages in Sweden, even if only orally). These examples show the importance of historical and cultural aspects to understanding a given situation, for there are two parallel but unrelated explanations (the Bible, the cinema) that clearly contribute to a tradition of reading.

21. In short, the idea that some countries have a learning culture while others do not is simplistic and probably false. Firstly, there is a gradation in people's desire to learn, and this continuum is clearly perceptible when one visits countries as different as those covered by the Thematic Review. Next, this continuum is also found within the same country, just as between different countries, and what changes are the relative volumes across countries. Lastly, nothing is predetermined in this regard, since individuals' motivations can be changed by their environment. This will only occur because a persuasive system of arguments has been established. Changing mentalities is such a lengthy process that governments cannot afford to dispense with this system of incentives, which is often lacking.

Table 1.4¹⁰ **Level of prose literacy according to respondents' self-assessment of their reading abilities**

		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Finland	Excellent or good	3.49 *	21.32	45.81	26.28	3.09
	Moderate or poor	16.51	41.95	36.73	4.81	0.00
Norway	Excellent or good	3.58	21.07	54.32	19.55	1.48
	Moderate or poor	23.66	36.37	35.70	4.28	0.00
Denmark	Excellent or good	6.25	34.68	51.55	7.44	0.09
	Moderate or poor	32.48	45.84	21.68	0.00	0.00
Canada	Excellent or good	6.49	24.11	39.71	25.84	3.84
	Moderate or poor	47.24	27.47	23.31	1.98	0.00
United Kingdom	Excellent or good	10.49	28.13	38.31	21.22	1.85
	Moderate or poor	42.77	37.91	15.69	3.62	0.01
Switzerland	Excellent or good	9.87	37.19	42.64	9.95	0.35
	Moderate or poor	61.51	25.96	11.54	0.83	0.15
Portugal	Excellent or good	25.77	35.71	30.51	7.27	0.74
	Moderate or poor	67.70	24.17	7.77	0.36	0.00

^o The countries are ranked in ascending order in the cell "Excellent or good" and "Level 1".

* I.e., in Finland, 3.49 % of those who consider their reading skills to be excellent or good are at Level 1 on the Prose scale.

Source : IALS (processed by authors)

10. Table 1.4 is comparable to Table 1.2, except that adults' skills have been combined into two classes rather than four.

1.1.2. *Adult learners are long-time converts*

22. Although very difficult, it is nevertheless essential to attempt to describe the motivations of learners and non-learners since it provides the keys for improving adult participation in all kinds of learning activities (Table 1.5).

23. Before describing and analysing the motivations of the various groups of the population with respect to learning, we should point out that this distinction between adults who are convinced of the importance of education and training — “converts” — and those who are not is no doubt one of the most relevant distinctions for the analysis of adult learning and consequently for this document. There are many other ways to approach the problems of adult learning. However, the approach that consists of recognising that one segment of the population is more or less strongly committed to learning while the other is not raises issues such as the form of education and training, the method of financing, the location and type of learning premises and the nature of the education and training supply. This is because there is a greater need to ensure that training is effective when it is being provided to people that it has been difficult to persuade of the benefits of training or who, in any case, did not come to the training site on their own initiative. These learners will often give up at the first pretext, as the interviews of the Thematic Review’s expert teams have confirmed in the field: the problem is not so much to persuade adults to participate in education and training programmes, but to convince the few adults that have been persuaded to do so to remain in them. All this applies whatever the motive for taking up the learning, whether professional or personal.

24. It is essential to cover related costs (childcare, transport, etc.) for less motivated learners, since everything is much more complicated to organise for individuals who will leave a training programme at the first opportunity. These adults, who are not convinced of the benefits of learning, must be quickly made to realise the usefulness of what they are doing if they are not to complain and/or disappear. For all these reasons, the issues of usefulness, financing, motivation, policy consistency and return on training are much more relevant for these populations that are initially hostile to learning. Nor is the word “hostile” too strong, as is borne out by stories of certain adults met in training centres: there is sometimes a hostility towards education on the part of former low achievers and dropouts, and towards the education system in general and the traditional form of education that focuses on an all-knowing teacher who transmits knowledge to an all too often passive audience assumed to know little or nothing¹¹.

25. Throughout the rest of this analysis, more than the distinction between general education and vocational training, this distinction between those who are convinced of the benefits of education and training and those who are not¹² will be used in a cross-cutting approach, even though the breakdown of the sections does not directly reflect this dichotomy.

11. This argument is in fact somewhat more complex than it seems since passivity can sometimes be reassuring to adults who do not wish to be the focus of attention in a situation in which they are unsure of themselves.

12. To which a further distinction between those who can be “converted” and those who are irremediably hostile will sometimes be added.

Table 1.5. **Participation in training activities between the age of 25 and 64 by type of training and employment status, 1994-1998, (%)**

	Total	Employed	Unemployed	Inactive
<u>All types of training</u>				
Canada	36.4	41.9	30.1	23.1
Denmark	56.2	60.7	51.1	39.0
Finland	58.2	69.9	29.4	32.1
Norway	48.4	54.1	*33.2	21.8
Portugal	13.0	16.7	*9.8	*4.7
United Kingdom	44.9	56.0	33.1	14.3
Switzerland	41.5	45.7	32.3	27.3
Sweden	54.3	60.1	45.6	28.7
<i>Average of the IALS Survey (20 countries)</i>	<i>34.9</i>	<i>42.8</i>	<i>26.4</i>	<i>13.6</i>
<u>Vocational training</u> **				
Canada	29.6	37.5	22.0	9.9
Denmark	48.7	54.6	38.8	26.9
Finland	40.0	51.1	*11.6	15.8
Norway	44.4	50.9	*26.7	14.5
Portugal	-	-	-	-
United Kingdom	39.7	51.8	24.0	7.0
Switzerland	26.3	31.8	*26.9	6.0
Sweden	-	-	-	-
<i>Average of the IALS survey (20 countries)</i>	<i>29.3</i>	<i>37.6</i>	<i>21.4</i>	<i>6.9</i>

* Fewer than 30 individuals per box. ** Not available for Portugal and Sweden

° I.e., in Germany 18.1 % of the population say that they are participating in training activities. This rate rises to 26.7 % if they are unemployed and drops to 6.1 % if they are inactive.

Source : IALS (tprocessed by authors).

1.1.3. Needs that are not directly employment-related – The populations concerned

26. As was mentioned earlier, this section is organised on the basis of the purpose of education and training, which may be employment-related (Section 1.2.) or not (Section 1.1.). Although we also pointed out that the difference between them is sometimes slight, this section will seek to define the needs of adults who are not well prepared to make their way in their own society in an environment that increasingly requires mastery of basic skills. Above all, it shows the validity of the approach that a number of countries have rightly initiated by making basic training the foundation of all progress, even if it is undertaken for directly employment-related purposes. It is important to dissociate adult learning from its general or employment-related purpose in order to make it clear that, just as schools must not only prepare pupils for the job market but also for life, adult learning also has benefits that go well beyond employment alone. During country visits, the expert teams observed that the actors that they met were fully aware of the fact that adult learning has an impact on the functioning of society as a whole (democracy, citizenship, etc.) and not only within firms.

27. Basic reading, writing and quantitative skills are among some of the most important adult learning issues. The weaknesses shown in this field by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) cannot be denied. The orders of magnitude are open to discussion, as are the ranking and absolute differences between countries no doubt, but the facts are inescapable: a far from negligible portion of the population of the eight countries covered by the survey¹³ has difficulties in using their own language. In

13. Spain did not participate in the IALS survey.

most cases, this does mean that they are unable to read a text, but are unable to draw the correct conclusions from a document that may contain text, images and/or figures. On the basis of the IALS survey, it is estimated that at least one-fourth of the adult population may not be able to take full advantage of the benefits provided by the society in which they live (Table 1.6). The work done in the United Kingdom shows that 6% of the population has “very low” reading and writing levels and that a further 13% have a “low” level. “Approximately one adult out of five has a low literacy level” (Moser, 1999). These figures are relatively close to those found in the national studies of the countries covered by the Thematic Review¹⁴, although the figure of 10% is more often advanced. However, this latter figure should be taken more as a reference point than as a scientifically proven magnitude, for all countries do not use the same definition and above all there are great differences in the nature of the problems and the solutions for addressing them.

28. Although these various studies are clearly not measuring the same thing, they all concur as to the magnitude of the problem. Consequently, basic education has become one of the priorities of government action. It may be interesting subsequently, for a number of reasons, to divide the population in need of basic education into those who never had the opportunity to master basic skills — described as a “second chance” or remediation — and those who have partially forgotten them through lack of use.

29. A somewhat more ambitious objective has been to target the mastery of the skills attained at the upper secondary education level. This level, which is reached at the average age of 18 and in most countries gives access to tertiary education, is an excellent reference point as well as a concrete objective. It is a level that has an objective value, since it opens the doors to further high-level lifelong learning, which may also be either general or vocational. In fact, all countries visited that are currently passing legislation in this regard are more or less explicitly targeting the level of the end of secondary education (Norway, Sweden) in order to give all adult learners the right and in some cases the means and financial resources to reach this level. This objective has many advantages. Firstly, the level reached at the end of upper secondary education corresponds more or less to Level 3 on the IALS Survey’s literacy scale. In this survey, Level 3 is considered to be the appropriate minimum level for coping with the requirements of daily life and work in a complex, developed society¹⁵ (OECD and Statistics Canada). Next, it is a clear objective about which there seems to be a consensus. It prepares learners for the knowledge-based society since it opens the doors to tertiary education and training with high technological content.

30. It also has drawbacks precisely because it is an ambitious objective, and is not attainable in the short or even medium term. It is going to be very costly in those countries where a very large fraction of the population still does not have this level (Portugal¹⁶). In order to minimise the financial costs and loss of motivation on the part of adults studying on their own, a policy of recognising previous attainments is also required. Lastly, and especially, the level of end-of-higher secondary schooling is well above the level of the populations with the illiteracy problems referred to above. For these populations, it is neither a reasonable nor feasible objective. It could be highly demotivating to set such an objective given the wide gap between the level from which they start and the level aimed at. It is also known, from the research done on andragogy, that adults have to believe in the objectives they set themselves.

14. Even though these figures vary depending on the definitions used and the institutions that calculate them.

15. It refers to the approximate level of skills required to complete secondary studies and enter higher education. Like the higher levels, it requires the ability to interpret a number of sources of information and solve more complex problems.

16. It is absolutely essential to distinguish between the number of years of schooling adults may have, and the level of vocational qualification they have attained. Portugal is a perfect example of this. While an appreciable proportion of adults have 3 (women) or 4 (men) years of schooling, many of them have acquired very high-level vocational skills. The debate on the recognition of attainments is thus absolutely central.

Table 1.6. Literacy levels in 8 of the 9 countries in the thematic review

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Sweden	7.5	20.3	39.7	26.1	6.4
Norway	8.5	24.7	49.2	16.4	1.1
Denmark	9.6	36.4	47.5	6.5	0.1
Finland	10.4	26.3	40.9	20.0	2.4
Canada	16.6	25.6	35.1	20.0	2.7
Switzerland	18.9	35.2	36.7	8.8	0.3
United Kingdom	21.8	30.3	31.3	15.3	1.2
Portugal	48.0	29.0	18.5	4.2	0.3

*Countries are ranked — in increasing order — by the proportion of the population in level 1. Spain did not take part in the survey.

** For example, in Sweden, 7.5 per cent of the population is in the lowest literacy level (level 1) on the prose scale.

Source: IALS (data reworked by the authors)

31. A current and pressing issue — and one that is more important in some countries (Finland) than in others — is the acquisition of IT literacy. This stage often has more to do with learning basic skills in the same way as reading, writing and counting, at least in the 8 countries visited up to now as part of the Thematic Review. It does not necessarily come after the stages listed above. It needs to be conducted in conjunction with basic education, if only because one of the current ways of making good the shortage of training facilities in remote parts of the world or places where training is not adapted to the pace of modern life, is to use electronic learning. IT is now considered a basic skill in the countries in the thematic review because it is difficult to avoid electronics in general (cash dispensers, interactive television, etc.) and computers in particular. It is worth noting that IT has brought writing back into fashion (Pont and Werquin, 2001) because it is necessary to be able to write to use e-mail or the Internet; even more noteworthy is the fact that the acquisition of IT skills sometimes precedes learning to read, write and count. We may quote the example of an illiterate young Norwegian perfectly at home with a computer on which he was learning to read and write Norwegian and who, incidentally, spoke perfect English.

32. IT is a gateway both to the information economy and the information society, and failure to master it can jeopardise the exercise of a citizen's fundamental rights and duties. The importance of widely available IT training for adults is thus underlined, though obviously the urgency and the problems are not all the same as for the three basic skills (reading, writing, elementary calculation) mentioned earlier.

33. Though often presented as a panacea, IT and cyberlearning (or e-learning)¹⁷ need to be placed in a broader framework underlining the drawbacks as well as the benefits. Many of the eight countries visited are very large countries and/or countries with very low population densities. A very large proportion of Canadians live on a very small fraction of the country's territory along the border with the United States. A similar pattern is found in Finland, where virtually all the population is concentrated in the south of the country. Sweden and Norway are also very thinly populated. The climatic factor also compounds the difficulties involved in setting up adult learning centres which are within reasonable reach of learners, though this is not really a coincidence. Distance learning in general and e-learning in particular thus have a very useful role to play when local training facilities are lacking, especially in that employers who have relocated to remote areas for tax, economic or other reasons specific to their line of business (mineral

17. Self or distance learning by means of electronic tools like computers, the Internet and/or electronic mail. [French text only: As the term "*cyberéducation*" is obviously a neologism corresponding directly to *e-learning* in English, it will not be used though it would probably more appropriate in this section on the general education requirements of adults].

deposits and forestry) are often reluctant to support locally-provided general education. However, it is necessary to look at the drawbacks of computer tools when used for general education purposes.

34. Among the drawbacks, there is first the cost. This argument is twofold. First, contrary to much received opinion, the infrastructure is still not fully in place and is still fairly costly to develop. Second, in e-learning, the marginal cost of an additional student is fairly close to the average cost. The first argument needs to be treated with caution given the glaring disparities between the countries concerned, but while one can readily conceive that IT can be an effective way of providing advanced or vocational training of a specific type, it is difficult to see it being of use for basic education or general learning needs, at least in the near future. During the visits to the countries with the highest proportion of households equipped with computers, it was found that even in these countries, not only did a substantial proportion of the population not have access to a computer but also that those households that had a computer were not necessarily connected to the Internet (Tables 1.7 and 1.8)¹⁸. The second argument, which is never addressed head on by the advocates of computer-based learning, is that in traditional teaching or training based on the idea that a group of people benefit from the knowledge of a teacher or instructor, it often costs very little to add an extra learner¹⁹. It is true that when training is very advanced or requires very expensive tools, the more learners there are, the more funds are required. But this is not usually the case for general education. In any case, cyberlearning requires as many computers and/or hours of connection as there are users. The problem then becomes one of the number of instructors. It is clear, from having visited numerous e-learning sites, that contact between the learner and instructor is still considered necessary, even if it is only on a weekly or monthly basis rather than on a daily basis. Increasing the number of learners immediately poses the problem of the number of computers and instructors, just to mention the most obvious material aspects. Cost makes e-learning unfeasible as a panacea for adult learning. While it may be readily conceived that it can be very attractive in some cases, as a general rule it should be treated with caution.

35. Lastly, there are more cultural impediments to the use of e-learning for general education. First, learners are often apprehensive about using a computer. The lower the level of education, the greater these barriers. Expressed differently, e-learning requires a minimum amount of computer training; otherwise, one can get a vicious circle in which it is not possible to educate certain adults because they cannot use a computer, or not well enough, and it is not possible to teach them computer skills because they are under-educated. This goes for the hardware. But it is also necessary to teach them how to use software and the Internet. While hypertext is undoubtedly an intuitive tool, and the Internet is undoubtedly very convivial, it stills pose barriers for a significant fraction of the population — those with the lowest level of education. A further problem, and not a minor one, is the amount of time that an individual can devote to learning. If learners have to cope with learning a computer — both hardware and software — at the same time as the training proper, one can be fairly certain that the least motivated learners will be discouraged fairly quickly, so that the upshot is counter to the objective sought²⁰.

18. The cost of the connection, which is very often proportional to the connection time, also needs to be taken into account, all the more when the user is in remote area. This can make the savings made possible by e-learning totally counter-productive, or even counter to the aim sought.

19. In discussions on this issue, the notions of average cost and marginal cost are frequently confused.

20. It should also be pointed that the speed of the computer often exceeds that of the learning process. A fairly high minimum level of IT literacy is required in order to exploit the computer properly.

Table 1.7. **Households with access to home computer (%)**

	1999	2000
Denmark	60	65
Sweden	57	60
Canada	50	nd
Finland	43	47
United Kingdom (1)	39	46
Spain (2)	27	30

1. Last quarter of 2000.

2. Provisional data.

Source: OECD, STI Scoreboard, from the ICT database, July 2001.

Table 1.8. **Households with access to the Internet (%)**

	1999	2000
Sweden	42	48
Denmark	33	46
Canada	29	40
United Kingdom ⁽¹⁾	20	33
Finland	25	30

1. Last quarter 2000.

2. For Denmark and the United Kingdom, access via a home computer; for the other countries, access through any other device (computer, phone, TV, etc.).

Source: OECD, STI scoreboard, based on the ICT database, July 2001.

36. Lastly, there are a vast number of learning areas that are useful, agreeable or necessary for adults to study, but which do not necessarily fit within the framework outlined. Because this type of learning is difficult to define, it will be discussed in the context of the numerous themes that follow. It can include language classes before going on holiday, golf lessons, etc., or subjects that are difficult to pre-identify and thus to classify exactly. A recent example from the United Kingdom may illustrate this: many observers and actors found it difficult to accept that diving lessons be financed out of public funds or as part of vocational training. And yet, when one thinks about it, it would seem that, given individuals' new consumption patterns, leisure can become a significant good in an individual's utility function, and that learning how to dive can open up significant opportunities and make the sports-inclined section of the population employable. To conclude on one of the points with which this section opened, one of the assumptions underpinning this document is that training is never undertaken with several goals in mind; there is supposed to be a single goal, even if that goal is not necessarily, explicit or even conscious on the part of the individual concerned. On the other hand, it may open up several private or employment opportunities; hence the complexity of the system of incentives required.

37. While an approach focusing on adults' learning needs is very fruitful, it may be complemented by an approach focusing on specific population groups. The visits to 8 countries in the thematic review revealed the existence of several distinct population groups. As a general rule, highly-qualified individuals were deliberately excluded from the thematic review (OECD, 2000). Some countries like Portugal courageously decided to concentrate on individuals with low qualifications even if it meant showing their national situation in a less favourable light than it was in reality. It is not within the scope of the thematic review to define all population categories in terms of their level of qualifications. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out in this chapter on the motivations of adult learners, that the training needs of qualified individuals are usually well provided for, either by their firm or through mixed systems of assistance. Quite often, the most deprived are also provided for to a certain extent by the community

(the State, associations or charitable organisations). On the other hand, what struck the experts in countries like Finland or Canada for example²¹, was that the group immediately above the most deprived was not at the centre of concerns. And yet this group is very important. It comprises people who work but are on a low or minimum wage, and a large proportion of the unemployed covered by unemployment insurance or solidarity schemes. To sum up, it includes population categories whose training needs are not necessarily urgent from the standpoint of the usual criteria, but which may be thought to include a proportion — and not necessarily an insignificant one — of individuals who are mildly illiterate or who need training in the basics of IT for example. In the current debate on reserve labour force, these population categories should therefore be taken into account, since they can help to reduce bottlenecks and improve potential shortages of skilled workers. This issue will be addressed in Section 1.2.

38. As regards the characteristics of learners and non-learners, it will be recalled that, while vocational training is explicitly dealt with in Section 1.2, the descriptions and analysis of learners' motives presented here, and the manner in which they can be encouraged to learn, sometimes have a cross-cutting relevance, and often apply to the whole population and all the possible forms of learning. It is very difficult to draw a clear dividing line between the two types of learning.

1.2. Labour market training

39. In this section, highlights and emerging issues to be developed in the final Comparative Report are presented along two axes: employment-related training and public training programmes. The focus is how to improve the incentives and motivation for the adult labour force to participate in continuing employment-related training.

1 2.1. Employment-related training

40. In OECD countries, a sizeable majority of adult education is related to employment. According to the results of IALS, in the late 1990s, 84 % of 25-64 year-olds participating in adult education were in job-related training courses. The most common financial sponsor of employment-related training is the employer (O'Connell, 1999). Where employers do not sponsor training, for example in small firms, employees themselves are more likely to provide funding for their own training. Four important issues are highlighted here: risk of under-investment in firms; complementarity between initial education and employment-related training; mutual reinforcement between education and training at the national level; beyond cultural explanations, the existence at the macro economic level of a low skill/low quality equilibrium. Some issues for discussion will then be presented.

Risk of under-investment in firms

41. There is a risk that firms under-invest in training, though by how much is hard to estimate. They tend to select only those from which they expect a high return for their investment. A visible consequence of this is that there are considerable inequalities in access in training. There is a chain of cumulative advantage for already highly educated workers in higher status occupational groups in large firms, and a

21. A particular difficulty, due to the fact that the exercise consists of a field visit, is that it is always difficult to know whether the opinions the experts arrive at further to their visit are the outcome of adequate observation, or whether there is an inherent bias stemming from the fact that they see only a tiny fraction of adult learning activities and actors. While the host countries did their best, and even surpassed themselves, to facilitate the experts' task, it is also clear that choices have to be made when a programme is being drawn up, and it cannot be exhaustive. What is at issue therefore is the nature of the bias introduced.

chain of cumulative disadvantage for low skilled and older workers, those working in small firms or on temporary contracts. Even for their high-skilled workers, the return for their investment is risky and, owing to the possibilities of ‘poaching’ skilled labour in imperfect labour markets, firms often have a preference of buying skilled labour rather than investing in training.

42. Thus, the amount of training may not be socially optimal (Arnal *et al.*, 2001). Current investment levels are regarded as too low to ensure the replenishment of the skills pool in a more knowledge-intensive economy and with an ageing labour force. No single solution exists, but there may be a case for some form of social intervention in the market for training. Policies that enhance human capital are clearly indispensable to tackle the emerging shortage for some occupations and skills. While the acquisition of skills has become a major public need and a fundamental issue for governments, there is a danger that as governments gradually privatise expertise in this field and defer to the private sector’s priorities, they will lose the capacity to sustain collective, public concerns (Crouch, Finegold and Sako, 1999). This process leads, in turn, to government action being restricted to residual care for the unemployed, which then limits even further the capacity of public agencies to contribute at the leading edge of an advanced-skills policy.

Complementarity between initial education and employment-related training

43. The evidence gathered in the countries under review suggests that more educated workers get more employment-related training. That is, initial education and employment-related training are complements. One could then ask the following question: Is it always productive for more educated workers to invest in training? In a recent paper, Brunello (2001) suggests that individuals with more education and limited labour market experience enjoy higher returns from current training — measured in terms of current earnings growth — than individuals with the same experience and less education. More experienced (*i.e.* more than 14 years of labour market experience) individuals with higher education, however, have lower returns from recent training than less educated workers with the same experience. There is, therefore, evidence that complementarity between education and current training in the production of human capital is limited to individuals with relatively little labour market experience. One reason may be that highly specialised education becomes increasingly obsolete over time. For less-educated workers with less than college education, the private returns to current training do not seem to vary with experience.

44. Employment-related training is justified for educated workers from a *maintenance perspective*. Due to technological progress, but also due to job changes an individual might go through, skills can become obsolete and need to be updated to remain adequately equipped for work and social participation. However, a large group of people do not receive adequate education during their youth and can get a second chance of acquiring competencies and skills from a *recovery perspective*. The current debate on possibilities of substitution, rather than only complementarity, between initial education and employment-related training generally is “hot”. From one point of view, investments in training the low-skilled are justified on no economic grounds. Quoting Heckman (1999), “the lack of interest of private firms in training disadvantaged workers indicates the difficulty of the task and the likely low rates of return of this activity (p.105)”. On the other hand, as argued recently (see the review in OECD, 1999a), the earnings gains from training are high for the lower educated, the categories of workers who are, on the other hand, less likely to be trained. Policies giving a priority to train low skill workers could then have a double effect of reducing social inequalities and improving firm performance (Boyer, 2000).

Mutual reinforcement between education and training at the national level

45. Does the relationship between educational attainment and training incidence vary significantly across countries? The general answer is yes but there is a growing polarisation both within and between countries (OECD, 1999a). Training tends to reinforce skill differences resulting from unequal participation in schooling within all countries. In addition, adults with higher skills and higher educational attainment tend to receive more training in countries with higher overall average levels of educational and achievement, as well as in countries devoting a larger share of GDP to research and development and achieving a strong trade performance in “high tech” industries. This suggests that educational reform and greater training are mutually reinforcing due to the tendency for firms to specialise in economic activities requiring higher skills across a broad spectrum of the workforce.

Beyond cultural explanations: the potential persistence at the macro economic level of a low skill/low quality equilibrium

46. Skills and knowledge are widely recognised to form simply one important element within a much wider matrix of factors that helps support high levels of economic performance. However, the literature identifies the central role of vocational training in generating growth “externalities (Boyer, 2000). The hypothesis of Finegold and Soskice (1988) of the low skill/low quality equilibrium moves beyond cultural explanations to an analysis of “systems” failure where employers react rationally to a battery of incentives provided by the institutions and attitudes they had inherited. It has been argued that, because of the interaction between supply and demand, a low skills equilibrium can be established, in which there is both limited supply of and demand for intermediate skill. Managers focus on rapid returns and compete on the basis of low cost and low price. Investments in more skills do not necessarily mean that employers will utilise these additional skills. Similarly, investments in new technology and organisational structures which require higher skill levels might get frustrated by an insufficient supply of skills. The market competes largely on price rather than quality. If these arguments hold, a policy that focuses only on the supply of skills might be not very effective. People who raise their skill level would keep on doing the same work as before. Gains from their new skills would be limited and the incentives to invest in skills would be reduced since it would be difficult to gain sufficiently from these investments.

47. In this context, Ashton and Green (1997) argue that a high-skills route demands simultaneous change of the educational system and of the skill formation system. This implies the involvement of the key stake holders: individuals; practitioners; the social partners; and policy makers. Enabling a substantive upskilling of the workforce requires as much attention to the demand for skills by employers as to skills supply. They distinguish six requirements for sustaining a high-skills route and breaking up the low-skills trap:

1. Government must be committed to a high level of skills.
2. The education system must produce high levels of basic academic competencies.
3. Groups of leading employers must be committed to high level skill formation at the work place.
4. There must be some form of regulation and accountability in the process of workplace skill formation.
5. Workers must have incentives to participate in skill formation and continuous development at work.
6. On-the-job and off-the-job training must be co-ordinated.

Issues for discussion

48. *Training incentives for firms.* Given the, often, weak incentives for firms to provide job-related training, there is a need to make investment in human resources more transparent and, for example, to develop an adequate tax treatment of training expenses such as allowances for the depreciation of human capital. At the establishment/firm level, the effects of some mechanisms need to be carefully assessed (e.g. tax levy, an award for particularly progressive companies such as the Investors in People (IiP) programme in the United Kingdom, assessment and recognition of learning outcomes). Beyond financial mechanisms, more flexibility to accommodate the realities of the workplace could be used to develop it as a learning place (e. g. shift work, job rotation, multi-skilled team, etc.). At the local or sectoral level, firms could use networking for pooling training activities. Good practises will be presented in the Comparative Report.

49. *Training incentives for workers.* There seems to exist a particularly strong training divide among adult workers according to gender, generation (25-34 versus 55-64), the size of the firm, the sector, the occupation, after controlling for the education characteristics of the adult workers. Is the type of worker receiving less training the same across countries? Are there good practises which can counterbalance these effects? How does one address the needs of special groups of workers such as the low skilled, the working poor and older workers? Motivation measures could be more fully developed and assessed by strengthening financial incentives through individual learning accounts (ILAs), competence insurance schemes, company schemes, rights to subsidised study leave, training opportunities for the unemployed, time-life portfolios and part-time contracts in order to pursue further studies.

50. *Training incentives at the macro-level.* At the sectoral and national levels, the social partners have an important role to play in negotiating agreements for co-funding of learning for employees and in setting targets for continuing training based on best practices. They could also promote more flexible working arrangements that make participation in learning practically feasible. Government has a key role to play in defining general frameworks to promote employment-related training. Shared funding and responsibilities with the Social Partners also need to be defined (see for instance the agreement entitled *Lifelong learning as part of working life* concluded in November 2000 in Finland as an Annex to the latest tripartite negotiations and the Tripartite Agreement on Employment, labour market, education and training policies concluded in February 2001 in Portugal).

1.2.2. *Public training programmes*

51. Public training programmes have their starting point in the activities of the Public Employment Service (PES). In most countries, the PES provides or purchases training places for the unemployed, with the aim of improving both their chances of gaining employment and equipping them to compete for jobs higher up the occupational scale. Training programmes for the unemployed are usually considered as “active” rather than “passive” programmes (*i.e.* designed to help the unemployed back into work” rather than “concerned with the payment of unemployment benefits”), even if this distinction is blurred in practise. In fact, as Robinson (2000) notes, one key feature of active programmes is that participation or non-participation in them increasingly plays a role in securing access to the benefit system. The PES also provides training programmes for employers in order to improve the supply of their workers and to prevent shortages of labour. Good practises are evident in Denmark in the public vocational training institution (AMU) and the different Regional Labour Councils. Three aspects will be developed here: large variation across countries in public spending and participants in public training programmes; potential conflicts between different objectives; and mixed effects according to evaluation studies. Some emerging issues for the Comparative Report on policies to improve public training programmes will then be presented.

Large variation across countries in public spending and participants in public training programmes

52. On average, the nine countries under review spent in 2000 0.3% of GDP on public training (Table 2.1). There is a tendency to reduce training expenditure when unemployment is declining (OECD, 2001), except in Denmark, Spain and, to a lesser extent, in Portugal and Switzerland. Training usually accounts for the largest share of spending on active measures: on average, the nine countries devoted 28% of their total public spending on active measures. There is, however, a wide variation across the nine countries. The training share of public spending on active measures ranged in 2000 from a low of 11% in Norway to a high of 54% in Denmark.

53. The inflows of participants in training programmes relative to the size of the labour force reached 5% in 2000 on average in the nine countries under review. While training spending has risen only slightly as a proportion of GDP, the participant inflow has risen much faster: in 2000, more than three times as many adults entered a training programme as did in 1985, and around 50% more than in 1992. This very likely reflects the greater use of shorter training courses and reduced emphasis on expensive programmes such as long periods of training. There is a wide disparity across countries, ranging from 0.1% of the labour force in Switzerland to 15.8% in Denmark.

Table 2.1. Public training programmes: Spending, share of active measures and inflows of participants

	Spending on public training (% of GDP)			Spending on public training (% of active measures)			New participants (% of labour force)		
	1985	1993	2000	1985	1993	2000	1985	1993	2000
Canada ^a	0.35	0.31	0.17	54.62	46.97	34.61	1.74	2.76	1.61
Denmark	0.43	0.47	0.84	38.91	26.94	54.27	5.59	11.19	15.78
Finland	0.26	0.47	0.35	29.26	27.50	32.74	1.24	2.80	3.40
Norway	0.10	0.33	0.08	16.34	28.61	10.51	0.75	3.53	1.05
Portugal ^b	0.18	0.25	0.30	51.39	29.93	40.50	0.21	1.33	9.92
Spain	0.02	0.11	0.29	6.68	22.75	30.13	0.50	3.00	9.93
Sweden	0.50	0.75	0.31	23.68	25.56	22.27	1.86	4.22	2.87
Switzerland	0.01	0.06	0.09	6.50	16.24	18.11	0.32	1.03	0.07
United Kingdom ^c	0.07	0.15	0.05	9.23	26.41	12.96	..	1.28	0.51
Unweighted average	0.22	0.32	0.28	26.29	27.88	28.46	1.53	3.46	5.02
OECD unweighted average	0.17	0.22	0.20	22.50	27.45	26.25	0.57	2.72	3.80

Source: OECD database on labour market programmes.

.. Not available

a) Last update in 1997.

b) Last update in 1998.

c) Last update in 1999.

Notes: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden : 1986 instead of 1985; Portugal 1987 instead of 1985.

Potential conflicts between different objectives

54. The aim of public training programmes is to improve both the chances of participants in gaining employment and equipping them to compete for jobs higher up the occupational scale. The PES subsidises training to prevent under-investment, mainly in technical training, and to create more equal opportunities. One can think of public training programmes balancing three distinct objectives at the macro level: 1) the reduction of unemployment; 2) the reduction or prevention of skill shortages; and 3) the acquisition of more education or higher skills. These objectives can conflict. Programmes designed to move people

quickly off benefit do not allow them to participate in full training programmes and their skills are not raised. The conflict is greater when the economy is booming and when there are labour shortages because trainees are often obliged to drop out of the training programmes because they found a job. Some argue that, in the long run, it is a loss of skill formation for society.

Mixed effects according to evaluation studies

55. Evaluations of public training programmes in OECD countries suggest a very mixed track record [see Martin (2000) for a recent overview of the evidence from OECD countries' experiences]. Some programmes have produced low or even negative rates of return for participants when the estimated programme effects on earnings or employment are compared with the cost of achieving those effects. However, some public training programmes do work. It is noticeable that the most consistently positive results were recorded for adult women and that the findings were less optimistic with regard to adult men. A recent evaluation of the impact of government-sponsored training programmes on the labour market transitions of disadvantaged young male adults in Canada shows that their participation in training programmes while on unemployment insurance provides them some benefits in the form of increased transitions into employment (Gilbert *et. al*, 2001). On the other hand, poorly educated males who participate in welfare training programmes do worse than those who do not participate, even after controlling for unobserved heterogeneity.

56. Most of these results are derived from the "experimental" approach of evaluation based on random assignment of participants into control groups in order to eliminate self-selection biases and to provide adequate mean programme impact. This approach has been challenged by Ham and Lalonde (1996) arguing that even if this methodology does provide an adequate short-term mean programme impact, it does not guarantee that long-term mean programme impact is void of any systematic biases. In most OECD countries, non-experimental evaluation of training programmes are only possible due to a lack of appropriate data, given that a random implementation of social programmes is not admissible (Baslé, 2000).

Emerging issues for the Comparative Report

57. *Training the long-term unemployed.* With a decreasing unemployment rate in a tight labour market, the shrinking pool of persons persisting in non-employment is more and more often composed of persons very far from being job ready. They often lack basic education and achieve only low literacy levels. At the same time, Labour Ministries devote less resources to training expenditures given that the number of unemployed people has diminished. How then can one effectively raise the employability of the long-term unemployed, given that they need to be trained on a more intensive basis to overcome serious learning disabilities?

58. *Evaluation.* Why some public training programmes appear to work for some target groups and not for others? It is crucial to have answers to this question in order to design effective public training programmes, mainly for the hard-core of unemployed people. Martin (2000) has already highlighted three crucial features in the design of public training programmes: *i)* the need for tight targeting on participants; *ii)* the need to keep the programmes relatively small in scale; and *iii)* the need to have a strong on-the-job component in the programme, and hence to establish strong links with local employers. One issue to be explored is: Are there other important features identified in the countries under review and what are the key challenges for training policies targeted to long-term unemployed adults?

59. *Beyond the conventional criterion of efficiency.* Even if some programmes are evaluated as cost-effective on paper, the implementation process is very important. Some framework can be associated with

disincentives for some groups of participants. As an example, Gray (2000) listed for the United Kingdom serious disincentives arising from an output related funding system for training organisations leading to creaming and the curtailment of skills training in order to secure an immediate job. Short-term success rates - such as 60% of participants in a job two months after the course – may prevent any disadvantaged unemployed person to be selected for benefiting from training. Employability is obviously a key outcome of successful learning, but there should be an effort to strike a balance between employment and wider social aims such as social inclusion. Going beyond the conventional criterion of efficiency and its impact in the short term, are there equity criteria to consider? How does one assess their long term and broad effects on the community?

2. The adult education and training market

60. In this section, selected highlights and emerging issues to be analysed in the final Comparative Report are presented. In the countries under review, there are a large variety of institutions whose main task is to provide adult education. In some countries, mainly in the Nordic countries, most of these institutions have deep roots in society. The 1990s have been a period of relative “openness” of the adult education and training market with the emergence of new providers. A good example of the type of new providers, at the frontier of initial and adult education, vocationally oriented, in the same time competing in the market but publicly subsidised are the Polytechnics in Finland.

61. Three features will be highlighted: the functioning of the adult education and training market; outreach and support services; guidance and information. One last sub-section deals with some issues for discussion.

2.1. *The functioning of the adult education and training market*

62. More and more in the countries under review, the adult education and training market can be qualified as either private or public or with some degree of overlap. In Switzerland, the market is in most cases private; on the other hand, there are the Nordic countries where private adult education provision without subsidy is negligible. What seems important to note is that in most of the countries under review, the adult education and training market is traditionally supply-driven although there has been some shift towards a more demand-driven market coinciding with the emergence of life long learning strategies. One piece of evidence that shows that supply does not adequately meet demand is when adults have to queue for training courses and there are long waiting lists. This is particularly the case for adults lacking basic education in Canada or for long term unemployed adults in Finland.

63. In most countries given the decentralisation and privatisation that have occurred over the last three decades, greater numbers of educational institutions tend to compete at the local level to supply the same type of courses. Concern has been expressed about the discrepancies in costs for the same services at various educational establishments and about the lack of transparency for the participants. The following questions were often raised in the participating countries: How to stimulate partnership and co-operation in a competing sector? When private institutions tend to attract the best participants, is the role of government to act as provider of last resort for disadvantaged participants?

2.2. *Outreach and support services*

64. Even when the training supply attempts to meet the learners demand, there are limits to widening participation in learning. Those policies can only meet explicit learning demands and are not able to reach the would-be learner who is invisible because he or she does not show up or is not motivated. This is

particularly a problem for disadvantaged adults. There is, thus, an outreach problem to solve. More effective outreach may be necessary, including a more active effort to reach out to adults in the workplace, associations, churches, unions, and other public or community-based institutions and to provide them with more personal contact in sifting through alternatives and potential learning pathways. Community-based organisations are well-suited to carry out, for example outreach, making available information and guidance, and providing some transitional programs (*e.g.* reading and writing courses) and support (like tutoring). The Reading and Spelling Shop run by the Workers' Educational Association of Norway (AOF) is a good example). Whatever the solution, a tactic other than simply providing information is necessary to avoid the current situation where, providers report, their students come through word of mouth and many adults most in need of continuing education never come at all.

65. The implementation of an enabling strategy for adult learning also requires that current providers offer the collateral support services to reduce barriers to participation such as transportation, childcare services and health services. In general, adults with family responsibilities are confronted with fewer difficulties participating in learning in countries where there exists public measures and family-friendly arrangements by firms encouraging a higher participation by parents in paid employment (OECD, 2001*a*). A lack of support services was often quoted as a barrier to participating in learning in Switzerland and Portugal.

2.3. *Guidance and information*

66. In every country, a constant problem in adult education is that of providing adults with information about the programmes and courses available to them. Unlike elementary-secondary education, which is compulsory and ubiquitous, the programmes available for adults vary substantially and there is a lack of transparency. Guidance and counselling services are mainly provided at employment offices or at certain schools and training centres. Existing services are professionally provided, but only for those who are willing to show up. A more holistic and pro-active guidance service, available on a recurrent basis throughout the life course, with special targeting for the long-term unemployed and those with a low level of education and lack of motivation is far to exist in most of the participating countries.

2.4. *Issues for discussion*

67. *Adult education and training market.* If the training offer needs to be varied to meet all the diverse demands of adult learners, what are the more promising ways to organise the adult education and training market towards an integrated approach? How can one balance partnership and competition between the different providers? Is the role of government limited as a provider of last resort for disadvantaged participants?

68. *Outreach and support services.* What attempts are made to go into the community and reach people who may be unaware of their needs or will not seek assistance of their own accord? Is it a common practise to create a 'one-stop-shop' where adults might come in and find information and advice on a range or educational, social and employment issues? What specific consideration has been given to people living in remote rural areas, and older adults who might be reluctant to come out and search? Where support services are lacking, what are the innovative approaches implemented by different actors?

3. Improving policy coherence and effectiveness

69. This section asks to what extent coherence in adult education policies can contribute to overall adult education effectiveness. For adult education to reach its objectives, it is important that policy is coherent, consistent and co-ordinated among the different actors involved.²² The issue is directly related to a number of questions posed in the thematic review and tries to respond to them from a policy perspective. Whether there are incentives to learning, whether there is an integrated approach to the provision and whether different types and methods of learning are effective depend on how adult learning policy is designed and implemented. Some trends and issues related to coherence and co-ordination among the different partners involved in the design and implementation of adult education are analysed below.

70. From different country experiences we see that adult learning is slowly being mainstreamed into education and human resource policies through increased efforts for coherent, consistent and co-ordinated policies. However, countries are doing so to different degrees, depending very much on the historical developments of their education systems and on their political structures. This chapter analyses how adult learning policy making is taking place in Thematic Review countries. The first sub-section reviews the general trend towards a holistic approach in adult learning and surveys what kinds of approaches have been taken towards this goal. The second sub-section surveys different institutional and management mechanisms that countries have taken in terms of co-operation among institutions and partners that participate in policy making at a national level and at a regional level. It reviews recent trends towards decentralisation. The third sub-section refers to the role of the social partners in the design and implementation of adult learning policies.

3.1. *Towards a holistic approach in adult learning?*

71. Although different forms and patterns of institutional arrangements exist in adult learning across OECD countries, there is a general trend towards a more holistic or integrated approach in its conceptualisation. Until recent times, adult education policies have been independent and somewhat fragmented efforts to target specific needs of adults, based on classroom based instruction, other traditional education methods and some distance or more innovative practices. Sustained efforts towards mainstreaming the education of adults into general education policies had not taken place. In a number of countries, it was limited to literacy and adult basic education. Furthermore, labour market policies targeted adults separately. However, the increasing unemployment rates in the early 1990s, the growing requirements for high skilled workers linked to the development of the knowledge economy and the increased awareness of the importance of human capital have slowly moved adult education to the political forefront. This has resulted in the growing importance of adult learning in policy agendas and to a certain degree of agreement among different political and social partners to improve adult skills and competencies.

72. A recent shift from the concept of adult education towards that of adult learning is part of this holistic approach. As the concept of education broadens to include formal, non-formal and informal learning, as well as a broad range of educational strategies, the traditional model of adult education is being replaced with that of learning. This approach offers a more systemic view of learning, and includes the diversity of demand and supply of learning opportunities as part of a whole system. It places the learner at

22. It is important to clarify the concepts first: Policy coherence implies that through joint efforts, government departments and agencies forge a mutually reinforcing policy action towards achieving a given policy objective. Policy consistency refers to the impact that the design and implementation of any government policy has on a policy objective. Policy co-ordination refers to the institutional and management mechanisms by which policy coherence is exerted among the various entities involved. These concepts can apply to a number of different policies and are directly applicable to adult learning policies.

the centre and includes all different types of learning that adults undertake. It also covers the multiplicity of objectives that adults may have for learning, be it for professional, personal or social reasons.

73. This holistic approach of adult learning is related to lifelong learning. Countries are making efforts to ensure that all individuals have the knowledge and skills to fully participate in society, trying to cover educational requirements of populations “from cradle to grave”. As mandatory education has been generalised in most OECD countries and completion of upper secondary education has become near-universal for young people, adult populations have become the main targets in lifelong learning. In fact, this concept referred originally to giving adults access to formal courses at educational institutions (OECD, 2001). However, it has broadened towards a more comprehensive view, covering all learning activities from cradle to grave and including formal and informal learning. At present, the view that adults should have the opportunity to continuously update their skills and competencies has partly been at the centre of a number of government initiatives in lifelong learning.

74. There is a certain degree of intersections between lifelong learning and adult learning policies. Some have separate lifelong and adult learning policies while in others adult education falls within the scope of lifelong learning. Yet a third group of countries only have adult education policies or plans. In Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, adult education is conceived within a broader lifelong strategy. Denmark’s lifelong learning policies fall within their adult learning strategies. The European Union has also been active in this respect. In 1997, the European Employment Strategy called for a lifelong learning strategy, although not much progress towards a global strategy has been achieved. The Commission’s most recent Lifelong Learning Memorandum of October 30, 2000 (SEC(2000)1832) puts forth a Lifelong learning strategy that is trying to raise the awareness of the need for adult learning in EU governments.

3.1.1. Specific policy measures geared towards adult learning

75. But be it within the lifelong learning perspective or not, adult learning has reached the political forefront and is slowly becoming an important issue in policy making. In recent years, most countries visited for the thematic review have taken specific policy measures at the national level. These range from general action plans for adults, efforts towards skills upgrading, targeting specific adult sub-groups or legislative initiatives that define adult learning. A number of these reforms are geared to improving the overall performance of adult education policies in a more holistic approach. Efforts have been made towards defining common objectives, improving co-ordination among different partners, providing a general framework for policy developments, and defining the use of structures that are most efficient for providing adult education.

76. Examples of measures taken by thematic review countries follow: In Canada, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) in 2001 discussed elements of an agenda to ensure that Canadians have the skills they need to compete in a changing economy. Denmark’s Adult Education Reform (May 2000) aims to prioritise the efforts directed at workers with a low level of education, and on the basis of supplementary training to improve their opportunities on the labour market. In Finland, a national strategy for lifelong learning was passed in 1997 and is seen with other reforms as a whole that will enhance the construction of individual educational paths for adults. Norway’s Competence Reform (1999) also defines a long-term initiative to expand learning opportunities for adults. In Portugal, the social partners and the Government signed an Agreement on Employment, Labour Market, Education and Training (2001) in which they propose a coherent strategy to raise skill levels. The tripartite agreement among the government and social partners to focus on vocational training of workers in Spain has been recently signed (2000-2004). Sweden recently passed a new law on adult learning and has mainstreamed the Adult Learning

Initiative, an initiative focused on helping adults attain upper secondary education. The New Skills and Learning Bill in the United Kingdom is focused on raising the skill levels of adults.

3.1.2. A shift from process to outcomes: National qualification systems

77. Another way in which governments have tried to provide a holistic approach is through the creation of National Qualification Systems. The shift towards a focus on outcomes rather than education and training processes can be viewed in this light. The definition of common criteria for the outcomes or results of training processes, can be an important tool to make different institutions work towards the same goals giving institutions and individuals flexibility to design their own education pathways. Qualification systems are recognised as powerful steering mechanisms for developing more open and effective systems of lifelong learning and for more flexible and transparent labour markets. As adults are increasingly required to reskill or upskill, and a multiplication of learning opportunities and certificates takes place, a system wide coherence can contribute. Qualification frameworks offer the possibility for progression routes and equivalencies within education systems and labour markets (DEELSA/ED(2000)3).

78. A number of countries have some type of qualification structures in place. Finland has had a qualification system since 1994, based on competence-based examinations irrespective of where the knowledge and skills are acquired. Portugal and Spain are in the process of defining national qualification systems. The United Kingdom's National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is a unified system of vocational qualifications. Efforts are currently underway to bring general and vocational qualifications under one unified system. Modularisation, or the division of qualifications into small units falls within this framework and is viewed as extremely positive for adult learning. It allows for an individualised pace of learning and for individualised "skills profiles".

3.2. Co-ordination among different actors

79. This recent trend towards a holistic concept of adult education, has been followed by efforts to improve the lack of co-ordination existent that has prevailed among the different partners involved in the development and planning of activities related to adult learning. The differences in institutional and management structures depend on and reflect, to a large extent, the administrative and political configuration of the state and also reflect the historical development, or lack thereof, of adult learning.

3.2.1. Collaboration across institutions

80. The degree of policy coherence can depend to a large extent to the degree which the different institutions that participate in adult learning share their vision and co-ordinate their activities. In most countries, the ministries or responsible institutions for general education have the responsibility for adult education. However, their scope of activity has been focused on Adult Basic Education, literacy programs and other types of basic and vocational education. On the other hand, Ministries of labour have focused their efforts on specific labour market training programmes for the unemployed or the working population. The degree of collaboration between the two ministries has been limited in most countries. Traditionally, each ministry has designed and provided its own training, without taking into consideration existing supply from other institutions.

81. However it is not only Ministries of Education and those of Labour that design adult learning policies. Other institutions also participate in this process: Ministries or Regional Development institutions, Ministries of Industry and Ministries of Health and/or Social Services also carry on learning programmes and policies for diverse groups.

82. An example of the diversity of institutions that design adult education policy can be seen from two country examples: In Switzerland, the federal and cantonal levels have different competencies for adult education and training, with the Confederation, the Federal Office for Vocational Training and Technology (OFFT), the Federal Department of Interior, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Pro Helvetia Foundation and the regional governments, in charge of a broad spectrum of learning policies. In Sweden, although adult education is comprehensive, policy design and evaluation is in the hands of a number of institutions such as the National Agency for Education, the Swedish National Labour Market Administration, the National Agency for Higher Education or the Swedish National Council of Adult Education and the Ministry of Industry.

83. Not only across Ministries, but even within Ministries, there is a large number of actors and institutions involved in defining and implementing adult learning policies. For example, in Norway, there were three institutions under the Ministry of Education with particular responsibility for adult learning: The Norwegian Institute of Adult Education (NVI), the Norwegian State Institution for Distance Education (NFU) and the State Adult Education Centre (SRV). These have recently merged under one institution as a result of the Competence Reform. The new institution will cover provision of adult education, allocation of grants, R&D activities and international relations.

3.2.2. *Different models of co-operation*

84. Knowing that a more unified approach can facilitate policy coherence and consistency, governments have tried to create or improve mechanisms of co-operation among the different ministries or agencies involved.

85. One way to do so has been through the creation of a new body or agency designed specifically for adult learning policy making. In its Adult Education Reform, Denmark defined three structures with the specific aim of improving co-ordination between Ministries (the Adult Education Council, Council for General Adult Education and the Labour Market Institution for Financing of Education and Training) which are expected to include the social partners. The creation of ANEFA in Portugal in 2000 responds partly to the need to co-ordinate the activities of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity towards a common objective. The future creation of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for England is supposed to deliver all post-16 education and training from April 2001 also falls within this category.

86. Governments have also responded to this need through the mergers of different institutions in charge of education and/or training. Such is the case of Norway, with the merger of the NVI, the NFU and the SRV.

3.2.3. *A trend towards decentralisation?*

87. The trend towards a holistic approach has been accompanied by a trend towards decentralisation in the design and provision of adult education in different countries. This can be due to a number of reasons: Because national governments have not focused on adult education, regional and local governments have developed policies for adult education. It also shows that in states characterised by a Federal structure, the local level has been quite active in adult education policy development. It also follows a general trend to bring decision making closer to adapt to local needs and requirements.

88. Decentralisation has made co-operation among different partners easier because of the scale. At a local level, it is easier to bring together education and labour market authorities, together with health and social services working towards the same objectives. It is often the case that adult learning centres are at

the same place, and that social service orientation can gear people towards training programmes. Centring the focus on adults has developed systems that give integral services to adults, be it for health, training or other demanded services.

89. The role of local labour markets is quite important for decentralised adult education policies. Since a number of the training programmes are designed to assist people in the labour market, the relationship with local enterprises, for training programmes, apprenticeships or for potential employment of adult learners is quite important.

90. There is a certain risk, with decentralisation, that equity objectives are lost, and that quality control is at risk. In fact, this has taken place in a number of countries. In Canada for example, quality control and standards depend on the provinces. Some allow for complete market provision, and there have been problems of adult education centres closing and leaving the students half way during the school year.

91. Sweden has experienced a process of decentralisation in its adult education policy. The earlier central steering system was replaced in 1991 by a system of management by objectives with a large degree of local autonomy. Municipalities were given responsibility for the organisation, personnel and school resources. The Swedish Riksdag and the Government draw up the national goals and guidelines for child care, the school and adult education in Sweden. In the School Act, the curriculum and in different ordinances, there are provisions that steer the contents of child care, the school and guarantee equivalent education irrespective of where in the country it is provided. As a part of achieving national equivalence, the National Agency for Education is responsible for drawing up national syllabi and grade criteria (Swedish Background Report).

3.3. *The role of the social partners*

92. Because a large amount of adult learning takes place at the firm level, participation of employers and trade unions is crucial in both policy development and programme delivery. The extent to which governments include social partners in policy planning and design varies across countries. The establishment of tripartite agreements has been a model followed by a number of countries. In Denmark for example, there is a strong consensus at many levels of co-operation and does not require specific institutional arrangements. Instead, there is a large number of committees and councils in which the social partners are present. Their role, as regards the vocational levels of education and training (both basic and adult) is a direct joint responsibility for identifying educational requirements and the development of relevant education and training programmes. They also take on a joint responsibility that the labour market requires the qualifications which the participants obtain through the education and training, and that these qualifications are broadly recognised in the labour market. They also participate in counselling as regards contents, supply, quality *etc.* of both vocational and non-vocational adult and continuing education. (Denmark Background Report). In Norway, there is also strong tripartite co-operation and the Competence Reform is the outcome of a tripartite effort to raise competencies of individuals with all, employers, employees and Governments as active contributors in the process. Portugal and Spain have also signed tripartite agreements to take care of adult learning and vocational training.

93. Other countries have consultative agencies or bodies at different levels of government where social partners participate. The National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT) in the UK is an example of an employer-led body that advise government on education and training policies.

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