

Workplace Adaptability

Introduction

Funded between 2001 and 2008 the Equal programme, a European Social Fund (ESF) initiative which operates across all European Union countries, has developed and tested new ways of challenging discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work. Equal has acted as a learning platform, developing innovative ways of tackling existing labour market problems. It has presented evidence-based outcomes which could be adopted by policy makers and delivery agents at local, regional, national and European levels.

This paper provides an overview of current UK and EU policy relevant to workplace adaptability and highlights how messages and approaches developed through the Equal Initiative link into UK and EU policy.

Policy Context

UK Policy Context

Despite the recent progress in the UK's skills base, it has deficits at intermediate and low skills level. While the number with no skills has nearly halved within the last ten years, the number of working age individuals with a level 2 qualification is estimated to have risen by over 1 million only since 2003. Further statistics are as follows:

- 35% of the working age population do not have the equivalent of a good school leaving qualification, more than doubled the proportion in Canada, US and Germany
- 4.6 million have no qualifications at all
- 5 million working age people lack functional literacy and 7million lack functional numeracy.

It is recognised that as technology develops and individual lifestyle and working hours will change and workplaces will have to anticipate and be able to adapt accordingly. Alongside the technological advances, greater global economic integration and unprecedented demographic change present both challenges and opportunities. The pace of change in the global economy is likely to put pressure on existing jobs. Evidence from the **Leitch review of skills** in 2006 – *'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills'* suggests that, parts of the UK economy are likely to be exposed to international competition to an extent that they have not been before. Furthermore, this exposure will disadvantage the lowest skilled. These revelations, call for the need to treat diversity as a source of competitive advantage and to recognise the business benefits of better work-life balance.

Flexible learning and training in the workplace

Improving the skills of the UK workforce is high on the Government's agenda particularly following the **Leitch review** which highlighted areas of weakness in the UK's skills base. Learning in the workplace will need to play a significant role to enable a substantial improvement in workforce skills levels. The review links improving workplace adaptability and skills within the UK economy as it places employers and individuals at the centre of a flexible, demand-led system for learning and training. The report recommends that there need to be an increased level of learning within, or linked to the workplace, through increased numbers of people achieving vocational qualifications. (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/Leitch%20Review.pdf>)

In order to further improve workforce skills the review recommended the establishment of a **Commission for Employment and Skills**, (<http://www.ukces.org.uk/>). The Commission will be established in April 2008, bringing together the Sector Skills Development Agency and National Employment Panel.

The UK's approach to encouraging flexible learning in the workplace supports the **EU's Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth** (see EU policy context). In September 2007 the UK Government published, *Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth: UK National Reform Programme update on progress*. The report outlined the UK's progress in line with the strategy including steps that had been taken to enhance UK's workforce's skills (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/B/9/lisbon_nationalreformprogramme210907.pdf).

Train to Gain programme, which delivers flexible training tailored to meet the needs of employers and employees and plans to take forward reforms recommended by the Leitch Review. Train to Gain will play a major role in providing opportunities for both low skilled and skilled workers to further develop their skills through tailored and flexible programmes. <http://www.traintogain.gov.uk/>

In July 2007 the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills launched '*World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*' which outlines Government plans for meeting the Leitch priorities. <http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/worldclassskills.pdf>.

Within the UK a range of approaches to improving skills are being applied. For example, the devolved Government for Scotland, published its own skills strategy, '*Skills for Scotland: A lifelong Skills Strategy*', in September 2007. The strategy which included plans to meet employers' demand for skills and make it easier to access the information, advice and guidance as well as the training and support needed to develop their workforce. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/197204/0052752.pdf>

The 'England and Gibraltar ESF Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007 – 2013' prioritises 'Developing a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce'. To access the priorities of specific regions go to http://www.esf.gov.uk/regional_esf_frameworks/

In response to the skills needs outlined above, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) launched the **Employability Skills programme** in August 2007, designed to give individuals on benefits the opportunity to improve their basic skills and gain an Employability Award. (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/2007/aug/emp031-010807.asp>).

The Government has also involved the CBI, the TUC and other organisations representing stakeholders in UK industry and business through 'Guidance to Encourage Workplace Dialogue on Training and Skills' launched in May 2007, to produce good practice guidance, helping employers, employees and trade unions develop workplace dialogue on training and skills. For further details go to: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/employment/employment-legislation/ice/workplace-dialogue/index.html> and <http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-13420-f0.cfm>

In June 2006 the **Work and Families Act** was introduced. (http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/en/ukpgaen_20060018_en.pdf). It updated laws on maternity and paternity recognising the need for more flexibility by introducing additional statutory paternity pay and leave. In April 2007 the right to request flexible working was extended to carers of adults. www.dti.gov.uk/employment/workandfamilies/flexible-working/index.html The Government also plans to extend the right to request flexible working further as the Prime Minister announced in November 2007 that the right to request flexible working would be extended to parents of older children. For more details go to: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/employment/workandfamilies/flexible-working/index.html> .

Carers UK, a member-led organisation which acts as the voice of carers, campaigns for equal rights to other citizens in terms of income levels and access to work, leisure and education. Carers UK 'Make WORK Work' campaign highlights the barriers faced by carers in retaining jobs, helping employers support working carers and making sure employees know their employment rights. As part of the Work and Families Act, carers now have the right to request flexible working, the first of the 'Make WORK Work' targets to be achieved. <http://www.carersuk.org>.

The **2007-13 European Structural Fund (ESF) Operational Programme** for England, recognises support for work life balance as a priority under 'developing a skilled and adaptable workforce'. Co-financing plans identify flexible working hours as a priority for investment, in the North East there are considerable numbers of women in part-time work and lower-paid employment, often due to childcare issues and working patterns of full-time, more highly paid jobs that are not family friendly. To try to overcome this issue, ESF funding will be made available to support the training of childcare workers. http://www.europeansocialfund.gov.uk/regional_esf_frameworks/

EU Policy Context

Skills and Employment

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2007/dec/com_2007_0773_en.pdf

At the heart of EU policy relating to skills and employment is the **Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth** which was relaunched in 2005. (The UK's response to the Strategy is summarised under 'UK policy context' above). The '*Keeping Up the Pace of Change*' report was published in December 2007 and outlined progress so far and the next steps http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/pdf/european-dimension-200712-annual-progress-report/200712-annual-report_en.pdf

The strategy identifies worker mobility as one way for Europe to operate as an efficient single market and enable individuals to find better employment. In response to the Lisbon Strategy, the European Commission published its **Job Mobility Action Plan** for 2007-2010 in December 2007. The aims are to:

- improve existing legislation and administrative practices regarding worker mobility;
- ensure policy support for mobility from authorities at all levels;
- reinforce EURES as the one-stop instrument to facilitate mobility of workers and their families; and
- foster awareness of the possibilities and advantages of mobility among the population.

Flexicurity

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/flexicurity%20media/flexicuritypublication_2007_en.pdf

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/pdf/flexi_pathways_en.pdf

The EU is increasingly aware of the importance of working arrangements. A key aspect of the response is "flexicurity", a combination of flexibility and security in working arrangements. Following consultation, the European Commission published its communication '*Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security*', outlining a set of common principles.).

Flexicurity is not a focus on one single labour market model or policy strategy but, four "pathways" have been identified that countries face in embracing flexicurity. These are:

- tackling contractual segmentation;
- developing flexicurity within enterprises and offering transition security;
- tackling skills and opportunity gaps among the workforce; and
- improving opportunities for benefit recipients and informally employed workers.

The European Commission set up an expert group and its final report "*Flexicurity Pathways: Turning hurdles into stepping stones*" was published in June 2007.

ICT in the Workplace

The EU acknowledges the importance of improving the e-skills of the European workforce. The commission adopted the "*E-skills for the 21st century: fostering competitiveness, growth and jobs*" communication in September 2007.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/ict/policy/doc/COMM_PDF_COM_2007_0496_F_EN_AC_TE.pdf. The paper proposes a long term e-skills agenda, including the development of digital literacy and e-competence actions, particularly for the most disadvantaged.

The leading ICT companies established the **E-skills Industry Leadership Board** in June 2007. For more information go to <http://www.e-skills-ilb.org/>. The Board has a number of initiatives including the **Alliance on Skills for Employability** which works in partnership to help technology skills, competencies and training for European citizens particularly disadvantaged groups.

Matching Messages to Policy

The Equal Programme has provided examples of good practice that match current policy and implementation priorities. It is clear from the information below how learning from Equal provides a direct value and match with several aspects of current workplace adaptability policies.

The Equal programme acknowledged the need for the following:

- Increase the understanding of employer's needs and the local employment situation in order for providers to give a more tailored and flexible level of support. This ties in with the Leitch Review recommendation to increase employer engagement in learning to meet the skills needs for business.
- Mainstream education and training provision does not necessarily address the needs of employers, industry or individuals through Equal. The development of new qualifications enables sectors such as creative industries to develop and accredit new forms of learning that are tailored to the needs of employers.
- Recognise the importance of soft skills such as organisational, planning or negotiation skills. Soft skills are important to potential employers. However, these skills are not often developed in conventional training courses or not adequately embedded.
- Flexibility is required in supporting workers to retrain and upskill. Delivering services and solutions through a mobile resource parked within office premises but away from every day

business pressures, allows the benefits of off-site training without the logistic problems of staff having to travel

Further Information

<http://www.dius.gov.uk> – Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

<http://www.berr.gov.uk> – Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/>- Learning and Skills Council

<http://www.ukces.org.uk> – UK Commission for Employment and Skills

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/> - Equality and Human Rights Commission