



*Europäischer Metallgewerkschaftsbund
Fédération Européenne des Métallurgistes
European Metalworker's Federation*

EMF Position on Lifelong Learning

COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING: THE KEY TO INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL PROSPERITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The position of the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF)
(adopted by the EMF Executive Committee, June 16, 1999)

1. The European Metalworkers' Federation demands the right and highlights the individual responsibility to competence development to enable every worker to contribute to industrial development, increased competitiveness, a high standard of living and a well functioning democracy.

The concept of competence

2. Given the pace of technological change, increasing globalisation, and the consequent changes in work organisation we need to encourage imagination and innovation and equip every worker with new and better skills, with knowledge and understanding. The present reliance on initial basic training and the occasional and ad hoc upgrading of skills is inadequate and outdated. If we are to meet the challenges of the 21st century competence development has to take the place of skills development.

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3. Competence is more than formal education. Schooling and initial vocational training provide a basis, but to this is successively added knowledge gained in daily work. Knowledge, however, is not sufficient. Competence implies the possibility of using and developing knowledge and the individual's will to take responsibility and to complete a given task. Competence development empowers the individual and enables him /her to cope with and to contribute to economic and social change. The most productive investment we can make is in the development of competence across the workforce. As a process of lifelong learning.

From job security to lifelong employability

4. Initial and continuing vocational training has up to now prepared workers in the metal sector to fulfil a certain, clearly defined task. In case of a change in technology or working methods re-training prepared them to perform this task in a different way. Continuous training thus led to increased job security for workers who engaged in it. However, since traditional re-training focuses on the acquisition of new skills rather than the development of competence, it does not necessarily lead to an increase in employability of workers. If the job they are trained for disappears (not merely changes), the present approach to training does not provide workers with the competence needed to find employment of a different kind quickly.
5. A training system focusing on skills development fails to increase employability of the individual worker. It fails to address increasing unemployment, high social costs, social exclusion, social conflict and instability. Furthermore, a training system based on occasional re-training rather than lifelong competence development fails to narrow the increasing skills gap which the European metal industry is already facing in some of its sectors. Demographic changes (fewer young workers with up-to-date skills) will deepen this skills gap and increase the need for competence development within the existing workforce.

The "new" metalworker

6. The "new" metalworker will be a learning individual whose problem solving skills, creativity, motivation and willingness to contribute and take responsibility will make her/him a valuable asset of the company she/he is working for. The new metalworker's greatest strength will be her/his willingness and ability to learn. This will be combined with expertise in a special field. A generalist and a specialist at the same time the new metalworkers' ability to be flexible and cope with change

will increase his/her employability. She/he will earn high wages. She/he will compete on the grounds of competence not on the grounds of labour costs. Employment passports will show and recognise all acquired qualifications also those gained at work.

Joint responsibility - many actors

7. This vision of the “new” metalworker will not come true without major investment. Responsibility for making this investment and help realise the vision lies with more than one actor. It is the responsibility of companies to provide opportunities for competence development. It is the individuals responsibility to use the opportunities offered. It is the trade unions responsibility to facilitate opportunities. It is the social partners responsibility to negotiate solutions and provide a framework for company level initiatives. It is their joint responsibility to lobby political decision makers. It is the responsibility of political decision makers to devise a system for financing competence development, to bring education systems in line with lifelong learning goals and the competence development concept. And it is the responsibility of political decision makers to devise a system to include those excluded from the active work force in competence development schemes.

Companies at the core of development

8. Companies are at the core of the development. They have to make it clear to employees that competence development and lifelong learning are part of the human resources policy of the company. Managers at all levels have to be aware of their company’s training policy and have to support it actively. Companies should be obliged to set up a yearly training plan covering the entire workforce and to develop a personal development plan for each employee, going beyond skills development and including personal development goals. The training plans have to be connected to the strategic aims of the company. Companies should provide sufficient time for training. Work has to be organised in a way that it allows for training and the use of training results. Wage systems should provide an incentive for training. Training should be the topic of ongoing dialogue with workers and their representatives in every company.

Recognising competence

9. Competence development depends very much on the employee's degree of commitment, which depends in turn on how achievements in the area of competence development are identified and recognised by companies and society in general. To identify competence and give the individual credit for having developed it, is therefore essential. Clear and transparent competence recognition procedures avoiding discrimination should therefore be negotiated in companies and sectors. The before mentioned employment passports listing all acquired qualifications including those gained at work should play an important role in these procedure.

A new challenge for trade unions

10. Trade unions have to initiate and keep up an ongoing dialogue with employers on the subject of competence development. They have to monitor and evaluate training plans developed at the company level. At the same time their task is to motivate workers to develop their competence, to advise them and to point out their individual responsibility for using the opportunities offered by companies and training providers. Trade unions also have to be aware of their role as an educator and try to incorporate the competence development concept in the training programmes provided for members. A system providing for a continuous exchange of information concerning best practice between metalworkers' unions is needed.

Social partners – negotiations and dialogue

11. While concrete training plans should be developed and designed at company level this should be within an agreed industry framework. This is the task of the social partners. Framework agreements covering all companies of the metal sector have to be negotiated in every country. The main purpose of these agreements would be to give guidelines to companies and to help create a level playing field for companies by defining minimum standards for a company's obligation to develop the competence of its work force. Guidelines should include minimum standards regarding the commitment of finances and time. A binding agreement negotiated by the social partners would prevent companies to use a weak commitment to training as a competitive advantage.

12. The issue of competence development should also be a topic for social dialogue in the metal sector at the European level. A common position agreed upon by the EMF and its European counterpart WEM would guide negotiations at the national level and would encourage a common commitment to competence development and training in Europe.

Political decision makers as promoters

13. Political decision makers have to establish the legal framework necessary to promote competence development for workers in the European metal industry. The EMF demands the establishment of a right to training and legal provisions for training leave for all workers regardless of age, sex or kind of work contract. These legal requirements should take the form of European framework directives to be transposed into national law.
14. Governments must also make competence development an integral part of their active labour market policy. Training programmes for the unemployed should focus on competence development rather than on exchanging obsolete skills with a new set of equally limited ones.
15. A high quality primary education and initial vocational training is essential for a successful lifelong development of competence. If competence development is to work, the primary education and vocational training systems in Europe have to be brought in line with this concept. Governments must act to introduce the spirit of a lifelong approach to learning and competence development to these systems. Structures and contents of primary education and initial vocational training have to be scrutinised. Most importantly, teachers and trainers have to understand and adopt the concept of lifelong learning and competence development.

Conclusions and finances

16. It must be emphasised that the responsibilities of the key actors can not be separated from each other. Only if all actors live up to their respective responsibilities will the concept of lifelong learning and competence development replace the present approach to skills based, one-off training.
17. The financing of training should be based on a mixed system. Companies should cover the costs for all training measures that are directly job-related. The concept of competence development, however, goes beyond offering training to acquire new skills needed to perform certain tasks at work. The personal development plan of a worker, therefore, could include training measures that go beyond her/his immediate task and responsibilities in the company. Since the company will profit from competence gained through personal development it should be obliged to co-finance wider learning opportunities for its workers. Arrangements for this should be a matter for negotiation. At the national level, political decision makers have to devise systems for financing competence development relying on contributions from companies, public funds and contributions of the individual worker (for example through using time off). This system has to be accompanied by tax incentives for companies with a proven record in workforce competence development.
18. The European Metal Workers' Federation believes that lifelong competence development is the key to prosperity and success for everyone in the 21st century.