

MAIN POINTS FROM
JOINT MEETING OF MANAGEMENT AND TRADE UNION EXPERTS ON
“A LEARNING WORKFORCE FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY: RETHINKING
METHODS, ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES”
UNDER THE LABOUR/MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME
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1. Lifelong learning is essential in a fast-changing knowledge economy with an ageing population. Business, unions and government all share responsibility for providing lifelong learning and encouraging its use. Individuals also have a responsibility to be lifelong learners. Governments take a larger responsibility in lifelong learning for the unemployed (as well as for the initial education on which adult learning is built); business and trade unions for those employed.
2. The time has come to move from rhetoric to action. A survey on lifelong learning conducted by BIAC and TUAC as well as cases presented at the LMP seminar, revealed that partnerships and social dialogue between employers and trade unions, as well as employee participation, are resulting in more focused training responding to the needs of employees and the firm, a sector or region. Two additional points highlighted by the survey and case studies are the revival of interest for learning at the workplace and the trend to link in a better way company strategies with human resources development.
3. Business and unions place different emphasis on why lifelong learning is important. For business, the key factor is remaining competitive and ultimately staying in business. For unions, the emphasis is more on maintaining and developing jobs and equity of access. This does not alter the fact that both attach great importance to lifelong learning. Thus they agreed to encourage employers to extend training opportunities as well as encouraging and enabling the workforce to take them up.
4. Taking the “high road” to training and learning is important for all. As the demand for higher level of qualifications is increasing, it is in the interest of employers, employees and governments to increase the employability of the workforce in this higher-skill environment. This implies tackling the current inequity in the participation in training. Currently the low-skilled are far less likely to participate in training than the higher-skilled, and groups such as part-timers, older workers and women are also under-represented.
5. To increase the motivation for training, new methods of teaching and learning can be useful – e-learning, mentoring for example. New management systems based around competencies place more focus on the individual and also call for new methods of recognising acquired skills. Innovative approaches are required in addressing skills, such as the ability to work in a team, which is not measured by qualifications. In other cases, employees may possess two-thirds of the skills required for a particular qualification level, and thus an approach is needed to enable an employee to acquire only the remaining third. Case studies in OECD countries show success in such innovative learning processes, with improved participation, relevance and efficiency of training.
6. Incentives for training are important, both for employers and employees. Public policy also has a role to play in creating incentives. However, there is no one size fits all solution, and various methods are being tried: tax breaks, training vouchers, training accounts etc. Moreover, investment in time is as valuable as financial investment. To increase the

motivation for training, the acquisition of new skills should be rewarded. Trades unions favour direct links such as an increase in remuneration, while employers see a wider notion of rewards such as promotion or safeguarding jobs. The question of who pays for training remains difficult to answer. For the trades unions, the best way to resolve it is to determine how to share the costs both in terms of financial investment and time invested by negotiation between social partners. Employers feel that how the investments are shared by employer and employee should depend on the return: for job-related learning, the primary responsibility is with the employer; in case of more general qualifications, the individual will take primary responsibility.

7. There is a need for more information on what works and what does not. Relatively little work has been done on measuring the qualitative and quantitative results of different training methods and incentives. The meeting felt it would be useful for business and unions in other countries to commission together a survey of lifelong learning at national level, as has already been done in Australia by the Monash University for The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. New methods are also needed to measure time and investment put into training since innovative training methods such as learning at the workplace, informal learning and e-learning do not fit into traditional “training days spent” measurement.