



**EDUC-022**

# OPINION

by the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions

on the

**Communication from the Commission:**

**‘New Skills for New Jobs: anticipating and  
managing labour market and skills needs’**

**(SEC(2008)3058)**

Rapporteur: Horst-Günther Klitzing



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**The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions,**

- given** the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *New Skills for new Jobs: anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs* (SEC(2008)3058);
- given** paragraph 149 of the EC Treaty regarding the subsidiarity principle in the field of school and professional training, according to which the Member States have complete responsibility for teaching content and the organisation of the education system with a view to providing diversity in the qualifications and education system;
- whereas** there is a necessity to make education and professional training policy more effective and modernise labour markets;
- whereas** there is a necessity for concerted efforts towards carrying out a comprehensive review of future qualification and labour market requirements alongside the Member States, companies and other interest groups;

**adopted the following opinion on June 3, 2009 :**

CESI

- 1) **agrees with the view** that the future of the EU is dependent upon its citizens acquiring a high level of skills and that the requisite skills and labour market requirements ought to demonstrate a considerable degree of harmonisation. It also welcomes the fact that the Social Dialogue will help towards calling for investing in the right kind of skills through education and lifelong learning.
- 2) **is nevertheless of the opinion** that no educational initiative will be able to attenuate the current crisis, as such initiatives can only ever have middle to long-term effects.



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### **A detailed analysis of the communication:**

As a whole, one can ascertain that the developments on the labour market and the way qualification requirements are presented in **chapters 2 and 3** are understandable and self-explanatory.

The only aspects which CESI would question regard the reductions explored in 2.2.1 in the first paragraph when it comes to combating factors which could lead to environmental damage, without merely focusing on reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Focusing exclusively on ICT capacities is also far from helpful in the medium and long-term, as a high level of skills is also required when it comes to developing other technological fields and in particular when it is a matter of overcoming societal problems (here, social problems in particular).

What one cannot overlook, or accept, is the completely ill-thought-out use of the terms used to designate skills. What is meant by ‘digital literacy’ (2.2.1, paragraph 5)?

Furthermore, regarding the ‘level of education’ almost as part and parcel of the ‘skills’ – 2.2.1, 2nd section – points to an ignorance of educational theory and educational history and leads one to suspect, as we will see in the examination of chapter 1 below, that the Commission is not concerned with the citizens of the EU and their education, not even with their skills, but rather simply with economically-exploitable capacities.

In terms of flow and content, **Chapter 1** seems somewhat divorced from the next two chapters. Ambiguous groups of words and sentences are interchanged with incomprehensible causal declarations, in particular in 1.1 -.

Here, two fundamental questions spring to mind:

1. Which group of people is being alluded to here– workers, mid-ranking or high-ranking staff, academics, public or private sector workers? We cannot place all in the same basket.
2. On what skills term are the statements based? How is this graded, when we talk about ‘skills’?

It also appears highly questionable to use a modern term without first defining what it means and to cease to distinguish between knowledge, skills and education.

Only in this way can we make sense of the talk of ‘new skills’, although no-one can be under the impression that technological and social progress have led to a need for special, new skills. Rather, what is clearly crucial is new knowledge and new capacities.



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As outlined above, initiatives in the qualifications system, and in the education system in particular, cannot alleviate any short-term economic crises. These crises have arisen because of economic (mis)management and can only be overcome through economic management and possibly political and legal measures.

Rising unemployment figures should always give pause for thought. This is no specification of the current crisis rocking the economy and financial policy in Europe. However, crises often plainly have something to do with a lack of capacity, a low number of people completing school or not completing school at all as well as a trend in some sectors to close plants in order to resume production on sites with low wage and social security costs – just look at Nokia in Romania.

But not every instance of unemployment can be traced back to a lack of capacity or even ‘skills’ on the part of the workers. At present, we can point to the car industry and the firms which supply them, where, on occasion, a high level of technical expertise and an equal level of practical nous are no protection against firm closures and subsequent unemployment.

Therefore, any attempt to bring down regional unemployment in the age of global networking and decision-making through ‘adapting skills to the requirements of the labour market’ is ineffectual and smacks of political posturing.

However, the way of thinking which seems to underpin the document would appear highly questionable. Industry or companies make up a labour market and would like to see it adapted to their needs. Should compatibility not be a given, the qualifications system will have to endeavour to set in place measures to put things right, where industry does its bit by investing in ‘human capital’ (and what a terrible term for employees that is).

However, investments will only be made through short-term increases in ‘skills’, the better to combine skills and the labour market.

The Commission makes no mention of the fact that the individual EU citizen is its focal point and the **education** of this citizen is important for the medium and long-term development of Europe. Clearly, in spite of all declarations of devotion to lifelong learning, this is but lip service and not an affirmation of the EU’s responsibilities towards itself and the all-important citizens.

And yet Europe needs this commitment on the part of the Commission towards educating individuals, in order to derive institutional strength and economic resistance from the diversity of cultural traditions in its various Member States. From the culture of personality and cultural education grows a cultural understanding of one another, consolidated by the Community and which only offers advantages for the further development of Europe. This long-term effect does not offer qualifications for the labour market.



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To summarise, CESI has no choice but to deem this communication counterproductive for the continued work of the EU committees and Parliament and request that it be thoroughly revised.

Brussels, 3 June, 2009