

setting up priorities for education and co-financing education, and training activities and HRD regional councils have been established; a similar trend can be seen in Slovakia with the transfer of competencies on education and employment to eight regions and the ongoing establishment of regional councils for VET; so too in Slovenia with Regional Human Resource councils; in Turkey with regional districts boards for public education; in Romania with local committees for the development of social partnership in vocational education and training (VET); and in Hungary where the Development and Training Sub-Fund is allocated to regions according to their priorities, and regional centres of excellence have been set up as part of the Regional Operational Programmes (in the context of the preparation for Structural Funds). In Poland, regions (voivodship) and districts (powiat) play a major role in setting up education and employment related priorities, and coordination with the State is difficult and poor”¹⁵⁵.

In addition, while countries like Denmark, France, Italy and the UK have decentralised to regions (a trend which can be seen as a contribution to the objective of improving insight into learning demand and bringing learning closer to home), they and others such as Germany and Finland also show a tendency to increase the powers of individual education and training institutions and to strengthen the role of regional stakeholders in regional consultation structures (e.g. France). The enhanced role and responsibility of the individual education and training institutions is particularly prevalent in the UK.

It is also noteworthy that in countries that have been major beneficiaries of EU structural funds, such as Spain, Greece, Portugal and the new accession countries, the EU rather than national governments is a primary provider of funds for adult education and training programmes. Notably, in the New Member States, accession and candidate countries, “the increase and diversification of Phare funding which now covers most of the main LLL [lifelong learning] priorities through activities to support the renovation of schools, provide technical equipment, and modernise and create counselling and guidance centres, now play a significant role in the major fields of reforms of education and training systems, as do the United Nations Development Programme grants and World Bank loans in some countries, the developments of the EU programmes Leonardo da Vinci and Socrates and the EU initiative EQUAL”¹⁵⁶.

Hence, it is evident from the above that while there are general trends across countries towards greater decentralisation and improving the efficiency of adult education and training, it is important to note that “policy responses vary according to a country’s economic and social contexts, the historical development of its education systems, and the political structures and systems in place”¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁵ European Commission (2003), *Implementing Lifelong Learning strategies in Europe, Accessing and candidate countries*, p. 5-6

¹⁵⁶ European Commission (2003), *Implementing Lifelong Learning strategies in Europe, Accessing and candidate countries*, p. 3

¹⁵⁷ OECD, 2003b, p.7

Social Partners

The role of the social partners in general, and the business community and employers in particular, in lifelong learning strategies has become increasingly prominent across Europe. This is in part in recognition of the market failures that exist in the area of adult education and training, such as labour market imperfections, capital market imperfections and training market imperfections, which lead to under-investment. In order to address these problems, “A more structured involvement of employee representatives and the social partners at various levels of negotiation and dialogue on training”¹⁵⁸. Indeed, it is of interest to note that while “much of the industrial relations literature is focused on the trend towards decentralisation of bargaining, more flexible use of labour and power shifts from trade unions to employers, the organisation of CET [continuing education and training] in many countries reflect a different tendency, i.e. that of increasing dialogue”¹⁵⁹.

However, while it is increasingly recognised that it is important to involve the social partners in shaping adult education and training opportunities through involvement in committees and partnership, the intensity of the actual involvement and responsibility differs greatly between countries. In countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France and the Netherlands the involvement of employer and employee organisations is particularly important. Such involvement is partly shaped by a long tradition of social partner involvement in labour market policies. In contrast, the role of social partner organisations is less pronounced in the UK and the US. In these countries, the responsibility is left to individual employers and employees with, for example, the government in the UK promoting the idea among employers that addressing basic skills should be a normal part of workforce development activity. In the US, recent evidence shows that consultation on CET (continuing education and training) in joint labour-management committees is restricted to 4% of union contracts and 8% of those with 1,000 or more employees, indicating that the role of social partners and bargaining is very limited¹⁶⁰. Moreover, “The use of national tripartite structures as a predominant platform for social dialogue in acceding and candidate countries has offered only a limited potential in terms of promoting in practice the concept of responsibility sharing. In fact, the experience of the transition process in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrates that in most cases governments have kept a leading role in setting the agenda of these structures while the possibilities for social partners to have through them an effective influence on the policy making process [in the area of lifelong learning] have remained rather marginal. This situation should be linked with the still important deficit in many countries of autonomous social dialogue at sector and plant levels”¹⁶¹. Between these groups of countries at either end of the spectrum, there are a number of countries that have a more medium-level involvement of social partners in shaping adult education and training. These differences are presented in the table below.

¹⁵⁸ OECD (2003), p.32

¹⁵⁹ OECD (2003), p. 38

¹⁶⁰ OECD

¹⁶¹ European Commission (2003), *Implementing Lifelong Learning Strategies in Europe: Progress report on the follow-up to the 2002 Council resolution on Lifelong Learning*, p. 8

Table 7: Involvement of social partners in continuing education and training

	Joint governance of CET funds by social partners	Intensity of collective bargaining on CET	Extent of participation on CET in works council-type bodies
Austria	No	xx	xxx
Belgium	Yes	xxx	xx
Czech Republic	No	-	x
Denmark	Yes	xxx	xxx
Finland	Yes	xx	xxx
France	Yes	xxx	xxx
Germany	Yes (few sectors)	xx	xxx
Hungary	-	-	xx
Italy	Yes	xx	x
Japan	No	x	xx
Netherlands	Yes	xx	xxx
Norway	-	xx	xx
Poland	-	-	-
Portugal	-	x	x
Spain	Yes	xx	xx
Turkey	No	-	-
UK	No	x	x
US	Yes (few sectors)	x	x

Source: OECD x = little activity; xx = medium-level activity; xxx = widespread activity

It is evident from the table above that there are different levels of involvement of the social partners in different countries, and that the involvement may take on different forms. Accordingly, while Belgium and Italy use relatively more collective bargaining on continuing education and training than work councils, other countries, such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands place relatively greater emphasis on the existence of indirect or representational employee participation at company or workplace level through elected work councils, rather than collective bargaining. Meanwhile, Denmark and France have extensive involvement of the social partners through both collective bargaining and work councils.

Moreover, it is important to note that the role of employers is not limited to involvement in dialogue with employee representatives. Rather, employers may decide to take the lead in providing training opportunities for their employees. This is reflected in differences in the overall expenditure of employers on continuing vocational training. It is of interest to note that there is no direct apparent relationship between the level of social partner dialogue on adult education and training issues, and the level of expenditure on continuing vocational training by employers. Accordingly, the UK which has little dialogue between social partners has experienced significant increases in the level of employer expenditure on continuing vocational training (see table below) in the 1990s.

Table 8: Costs of continuous training courses for enterprises

	Costs for enterprises of continuous training courses as % of total labour costs	
	1993	1999
Austria		1.3
Belgium	1.4	1.6
Czech republic		1.9
Germany	1.2	1.5
Denmark	1.3	3.0
Spain	1.0	1.5
Finland		2.4
France	2.0	2.4
Greece	1.2	0.9
Hungary		1.2
Ireland	1.4	2.4
Italy	0.8	0.8
Luxembourg	1.3	1.9
Netherlands	1.8	2.8
Norway		2.3
Poland		0.8
Portugal	0.7	1.2
Sweden		2.8
UK	2.7	3.6
EU 12	1.4	2.0
EU 15		2.0

Source: CVTS 1 and 2

In addition to the direct funding of employers, some countries have instituted national or widespread sectoral training levies or social security contributions that are earmarked for continuous training, as summarised in the table below.

Table 9: Incidence of training levies and earmarked social security levels

	Training levies and earmarked social security contributions	
	National level	Sectoral Level
Austria	No	No
Belgium	Yes	Yes
Czech Republic	No	No
Denmark	No	Yes
Finland	Yes (for training leave)	No
France	Yes	Yes
Germany	No	Yes (few sectors only)
Hungary	Yes	No
Italy	Yes	Yes
Japan	No	No
Netherlands	No	Yes
Norway	No	No
Poland	No	No
Portugal	No	No
Spain	Yes	No
Turkey	No	No
UK	No	No
US	No	Yes (few sectors only)

Source: OECD

It is thus evident that the funding and involvement of social partners take different forms, and that in some countries this involvement will be at national level, while in others it will be at the sectoral level. Moreover, there is not a uniform trend towards more or less involvement of social partners. Rather, countries that have little tradition of involving social partners in education and labour market issues, continue to show little involvement of these actors in the area of adult education and training, while countries with a tradition of significant involvement of social partners in the economy and society, extend this involvement to the area of adult education and training.

With respect to the less formalised means of learning, i.e. learning that is not provided through education and training courses, it is more difficult to empirically ascertain the role of the social partners. However, research suggests that social partners have a significant role to play, in shaping opportunities for on-the-job learning and the creation of learning organisations. Indeed, rigidities associated with social partners' narrow professional classifications based on qualifications acquired from participation in formal education may prove a significant obstacle to the implementation of flexible learning organisations and the creation of non-formal and informal education environments for adults. For example, it has been noted that in Germany "the Beruf concept is seen to be both an internal barrier [to learning organisations and human resource development in the workplace], preventing workers from taking on new tasks, and also an external barrier that restricts peoples' room for manoeuvre because their occupations are defined in relation to a limited number of work tasks

and are bound by rather rigid qualification and remuneration systems”¹⁶². Similarly, in Denmark there have been calls for greater flexibility and a system that relies less on the formal education system for information on the availability of skills among the labour force¹⁶³. In order for such a transformation to take place, employers need to change their recruitment and promotion procedures, and other stakeholders in the labour market adjust the requirements for membership of professional bodies. The social partners thus need to shape the labour market in recognition of and such as to accommodate the increasing need for lifelong learning.

In sum, it is evident that developments in the role of social partners in general and employers in particular, are very different across the countries under review. However, the differences are not limited to the level of responsibility of employers and social partners in shaping adult education and training opportunities, but also in the nature and form that the responsibility takes. As noted by the OECD (2003), “collective bargaining is occurring to various extents and at varying levels in OECD countries”.

Individual Adult/Employee

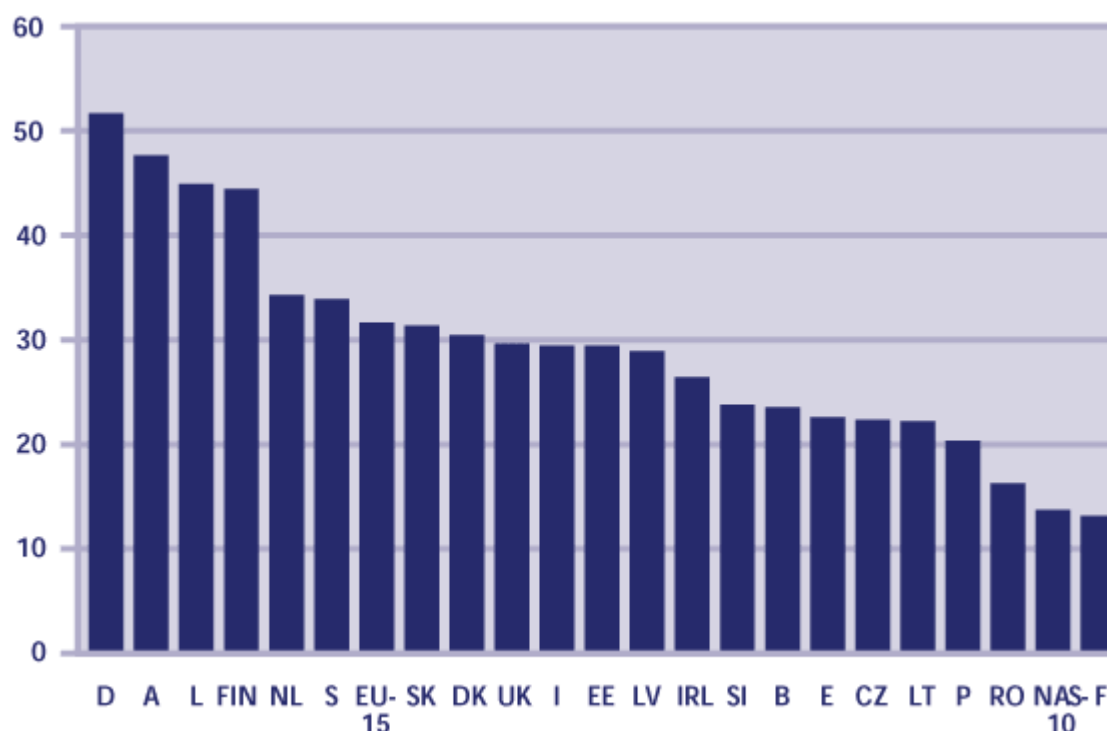
As with the responsibilities and roles of the public sector and social partners, the manner in which responsibility may fall on the individual adult may take a number of different forms. Hence, while there is little evidence that workers co-finance training through wage cuts, there is evidence from several countries suggesting that individual employees contribute with their time, i.e. training may take place outside of normal working hours. For example, research has shown that 20% of the in-service training volume in Germany is organised outside working hours. Moreover, in 55% of all firms in German private industry, employees use leisure time for continuing education and training¹⁶⁴. With growing requirements for skill acquisition and renewal, the responsibility of individual employees is likely to increase in the future. However, it is of interest to note that the extent to which this individual responsibility and investment is publicly supported or subsidised, differs greatly between countries (see section on entitlements below).

Moreover, with the emergence of self-directed learning and distance-learning opportunities, these new avenues of learning are emphasised in adult education and training strategies across the countries under review. This means that individual adults can increasingly take responsibility for their own learning trajectories, and access education and training opportunities more easily. With further developments in ICT as a new learning tool there are, potentially, significant effects on the freedom and responsibility of individual adults to pursue education and training activities. However, the extent to which these opportunities are being utilised differs significantly across countries. This is in part reflected in data on the participation in self-learning activities (see below). It is evident from the data below that the differences between member states in the use of these new means of learning are greater than the differences in use of traditional adult education and training.

¹⁶² Nyhan et al, 2003, p. 75

¹⁶³ Tørnæs et al, 2004

¹⁶⁴ OECD, 2003

Figure 2: Share of employed population who participate in work-related self-learning

Base: Labour force, weighted column percentages

Questions: C14a, C14b

Sources: SIBIS GPS 2002, SIBIS GPS-NAS 2003

Finally, regarding unemployed adults there are increasing responsibilities on the individual to undertake training as part of activation schemes. The participation in continuing education and training is thus increasingly becoming a condition for receipt of unemployment benefits. This has been particularly evident in countries that have undertaken considerable reforms of their labour market policies, such as Denmark.

Overall patterns

It is evident from the above that the responsibility for providing and facilitating learning for adults is falling on different stakeholders in different countries. While some countries rely predominantly on the public sector to fund and provide adult education and training opportunities, other countries are moving towards a more commercial provision, with individual employers and employees taking on increasing responsibility. For example, in Finland, “perhaps the most striking feature of adult learning today is the regulated market, heavily subsidised by the state and regional administrations. There is a marked absence of a thriving commercial provision that characterises learning opportunities for adults in many other OECD countries”¹⁶⁵. In contrast, for countries such as the US and UK the private funding of adult education and training by employers and employees is far more pronounced.

¹⁶⁵ OECD (2001), Country Note Finland, Thematic Review on Adult Learning, p. 7