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7 September 1998

**UNICE position paper on the draft Council Decision
establishing a second phase of the Community vocational training programme
Leonardo da Vinci**

The Commission recently adopted proposals for the revision of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, which build on the Communication "Towards a Europe of Knowledge". UNICE commented on the approach set out in this communication in April 1998*, and now has more detailed comments on the Commission's specific proposals.

General Comments

UNICE firmly believes that the Community vocational training programme Leonardo da Vinci can play a valuable role in promoting and disseminating **innovation in vocational training provision**. It is important that the focus of such action is on reaching high levels of training, to help meet the rapidly changing demands of European labour markets. European action can be of great help in this context therefore, by promoting a **European dimension** in the organisation and content of training in national systems. Given the serious skills mismatch prevalent in Europe, Community action can also help to **make targeted vocational training more attractive** by emphasising the potential employment benefits of such training.

UNICE is concerned therefore that these elements, which are of real importance to Europe's competitiveness, are not explicitly mentioned as goals of the Leonardo da Vinci II programme for vocational training. In particular, employers are concerned that the objectives outlined in the draft decision do not reflect the function of innovation in the programme. The business community believes that the revision of Leonardo da Vinci I should be taken as an opportunity to clarify the new programme's role as a test-bed for innovation.

Selecting objectives which emphasise the needs of target groups rather than concentrating on the policies which can achieve quality and innovation in training provision shifts the emphasis of the programme and blurs its purpose with that of other Community actions and funds. Employers are concerned that there should be coherence and complementarity between this programme and others which have a human resource dimension. In particular, care should be taken to clearly distinguish between the nature of the actions of Leonardo da Vinci II and the European Social Fund. This is essential to avoid duplication of action or dilution of the Leonardo da Vinci programme's specificity as a test-bed for innovation and quality in vocational training.

In response to the Commission communication “Towards a Europe of Knowledge”, which outlined the Commission’s approach to the revision of the education, training and youth programmes, UNICE welcomed the emphasis which the Commission had put on competence. Competence development is essential both for companies to maintain a competitive edge and for individuals to enhance their employability. UNICE regrets therefore that the same emphasis on competence development is not reflected in the draft decision.

Achieving a culture of life long learning?

The draft decision aims to “translate the will to stress the central objective of life long education and training in a European Context”. UNICE would certainly support this drive to promote a culture of life long learning in Europe. Employers however note the apparent contradiction between this valid aim and elements of the proposal. For example, the Commission wishes to encourage mobility in training in the context of life long learning, but limits the trainees eligible to young people. UNICE welcomes the fact that the Common Position of the Council (4 June 1998) on the European Pathways initiative for mobility in apprenticeship has opened this scheme to trainees of all ages. Given the changing needs of the labour market and the ageing of the European workforce, the scope of continuing vocational training for adults should be extended throughout the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci II programme.

Company involvement

Training should be linked to the realities of the labour market to be effective. UNICE therefore thinks that the Community programme for vocational training would be enriched by increased company participation. Simplification of the programme’s administrative structures should go some way in removing the barriers to companies’ participation in the programme. UNICE also welcomes the financial support available to small and medium sized enterprises under the mobility chapter. However, as stated in the UNICE position on the communication “Towards a Europe of Knowledge”, employers believe that the proposal should go further by ring-fencing a certain percentage of funding for the training needs of companies.

The Commission’s wish to involve companies in Leonardo da Vinci II is further contradicted by the arrangements for social partner participation in the Management Committee. While employers are aware of the technical reasons for the proposed arrangement, they find it unacceptable that they, as key actors in the field of vocational training, can only participate as observers in the Committee.

Valuing Leonardo da Vinci’s transnational character

Regarding the organisation of the proposed programme, UNICE is pleased to note that the Commission’s proposal simplifies the programme, both in terms of the reduced number of objectives and priorities, but also in terms of administrative procedures. Employers largely welcome the decentralisation in the programme’s management. However, UNICE

believes that such a step should not result in a dilution of the transnational character of this programme, which is of great value and should be further developed.

Greater emphasis needed on pilot projects

The Commission should ensure a fair balance between pilot projects on the one hand and mobility measures on the other. Employers are concerned that the current proposal puts inordinate emphasis on mobility. Mobility can be valuable if it is organised to bring real added value by introducing a European dimension to training or by bringing a new perspective on the organisation of training. However, much of the innovation from the Leonardo da Vinci I programme emanated from the pilot projects. UNICE therefore emphasises the need to broaden the scope of the pilot projects in the revised programme and to expand the demonstration actions to include the development of training which encourages entrepreneurship.

Detailed comments

UNICE questions the appropriateness of using the overall unemployment figure and level of long term unemployment as criteria for selection for transnational placement and exchange programmes. If the Leonardo da Vinci programme is to remain “upstream” of the European Social Fund, emphasis should be put on innovation and testing of good practice across the board.

The European networks must aim to enable project promoters from different member states to co-operate on certain specific themes. Taking a bottom-up approach, they should work to create greater efficiency and develop tools for dissemination of project results. The funding ceiling proposed for the individual networks of Community expertise and dissemination should be in line with the ceiling envisaged for the pilot projects.

UNICE welcomes the concentration on language skills to achieve a higher level of employability and adaptability for workers. Employers agree that linguistic ability is a key skill for individuals in the knowledge- based society, but would also emphasise the importance of language skills for companies’ competitiveness in the Single Market and beyond.

Equally, employers welcome the opening of the programme to information technology, not only in terms of communication and virtual mobility, but also as an important learning tool.

While UNICE believes that it is important to increase awareness of the higher competence levels being achieved not only in the industrialised world but also in emerging economies, employers think that article 11 on international co-operation should be drafted more precisely. Leonardo da Vinci funds are too limited to extend to financing the travel costs of organisations promoting training links with countries outside Europe.

More effective dissemination of results of the first phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme is currently being developed. UNICE believes that these measures should be carried through and further developed in the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

UNICE believes that the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training should not only be kept informed of the development of the programme, but should also be informed of the mid-term and final evaluations which will be undertaken.

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* UNICE position paper on the Commission communication “Towards a Europe of Knowledge” (COM (97) 563 final); 8 April 1998.

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Mr Klaus Schlick
Ministry for Education and Culture
Minoritenplatz, 5
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9 September 1998

Dear Mr Schlick,

UNICE has received with great interest the Commission's proposal for a draft Council decision on the Community programme for vocational training, Leonardo da Vinci II. European employers attach much importance to the development of targeted vocational training and consider European action to be a valuable resource for the exchange and promotion of new ideas and practices in this area.

For this reason, I am pleased now to be able to send you our considered response to the draft Council decision on Leonardo da Vinci II. UNICE welcomes the general approach which the Commission has taken in its proposal, but wants to highlight certain concerns which employers feel should be taken into account by the European institutions in their deliberations on this matter.

- The Leonardo da Vinci programme should promote innovation in vocational training. This should be reflected in the objectives of the programme.
- The selection of objectives which identify target groups rather than concentrating on quality and innovation in training policies shifts the emphasis of the programme and blurs its mission with those of other instruments, in particular with European Social Fund.
- Employers believe that the proposal falls short of adopting a life-long learning approach by neglecting continuing vocational training for adults.
- Decentralisation of the programme's management should not dilute its transnational character, which is of great value and should be further develop.

Yours sincerely,

Dirk F. Hudig
Secretary General

