The European e-Skills Newsletter

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Pre-registration is open till 30 June 2006 !
www.e-skills-conference.org

Editorial

Every recent survey of the problems encountered by business in implementing ICT puts skill shortages at or near the top of the list. Increased investment cannot bear fruit without adequate e-skills. Their availability is a key condition for successful innovation and for the competitiveness of European enterprises. The demand for e-skills has been increased by the growth of e-business and a number of sources point to significant e-skill shortages (Rand Europe and IDC, September 2005). Meeting the demand for e-skills is challenging, but essential for the achievement of our competitiveness goals.

The report of the European e-Skills Forum "e-Skills in Europe: towards 2010 and beyond" which was presented and endorsed at the European e-Skills Conference in September 2004, provided a very useful list of recommendations and actions. These have been followed up by the European Commission and leading stakeholders, who have launched well focused projects, studies and initiatives. Some of these are presented in this newsletter.

An accurate picture of the supply and demand of e-skills is now available and the ground has been cleared in particular for the development of foresight scenarios and a European e-competence framework. Leading ICT companies have launched a new multi-stakeholder alliance to promote e-skills for employability partnerships. What is still missing however is a well-defined and agreed long-term e-skills agenda: there is a need for efficient co-ordination mechanisms to ensure that actions pull together.

Therefore the time has come to design a long term e-skills strategy.

This will be the priority in the coming months. The Commission plans to adopt a policy communication on e-skills with an action plan in early 2007. In addition, the Task Force announced in the Commission's Communication on industrial policy in October 2005 will start its work in June 2006 and conclude in late autumn. The Task Force should identify the major obstacles hindering the competitiveness of the ICT sector and ICT uptake, and make recommendations on how to overcome them. It will be composed mainly of high-level representatives of the ICT industry and stakeholders and will be jointly managed by the Enterprise and Industry and the Information Society and Media Directorates General. Skills and employability is one of the key issues to be addressed by the Task Force.

It has been decided to establish a new group of experts in June 2006, on the model of the European e-Skills Forum, to advise the Commission and supervise on-going activities in the fields of e-skills and e-learning. The work of the new group will support and complement the reflections of the Task Force.

The outcomes of the work of the group and of the Task Force will be used to prepare a long term strategy to ensure adequate e-skills for the future across both workforce and population. Their reflections and ideas will be presented and discussed for the first time at the European e-Skills 2006 Conference on 5 and 6 October 2006 in Thessaloniki, Greece. This event will represent a major milestone towards the design of a long term e-skills strategy in Europe.

Designing a Long Term e-Skills Strategy

By André Richier, European Commission

The European e-Skills Summit of October 2002, organised by the European Commission and the Danish Presidency, set up the multi-stakeholder European e-Skills Forum, with Council endorsement (Council Conclusions of 5 December 2002). The Forum included representatives of Member States and Candidate Countries, industry, academia, social partners, training institutions, Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), OECD and all relevant Commission services. Its report **"e-Skills in Europe: towards 2010 and beyond"** was in turn endorsed by the European e-Skills Conference of 2004.

It called for action to:

§ Develop a long-term strategic approach to the ICT sector;

§ Improve planning and ICT labour market data availability;

§ Promote European multi-stakeholder partnerships on e-skills;

§ Develop innovative training for e-skills;

§ Support the development of a European meta-framework for ICT skills;

§ Foster e-skills in the workforce and in the population at large.

These recommendations have been followed up to the extent possible by means of projects, studies, standardisation projects, development of statistical modules etc. The emerging EU e-skills agenda has been discussed with stakeholders in a number of important events. The main stakeholders and the ICT industry have confirmed the need to develop a long term strategic approach to e-skills and a number of leading ICT companies launched a European Alliance on Skills for Employability in January 2006. Skills and employability is one of the key issues to be addressed by the **Task Force** on the competitiveness of the ICT sector and ICT uptake (it will also consider ICT uptake, IPR for competitiveness and innovation, access to and distribution of content, innovation in R&D, manufacturing and services, SMEs and entrepreneurship and achieving a single market).

The Cambridge conference "e-Business: The Way Forward" of December 2005 confirmed that major European enterprises see the **need for a long term EU strategy** to ensure adequate e-skills for the future across both workforce and population. To achieve this will require action at both EU and national level, in a number of areas. These include education, training, industry and labour policies. But there is also a need for action in fields such as immigration, taxation and research.

Above all, it requires co-ordination to ensure that actions pull together and that the initiatives of different stakeholders are encouraged. This requires planning and consensus of stakeholders in the long term and political commitment to enable the plans to be implemented.

Time has come to design, in close co-operation with stakeholders, a long term strategy concerning e-skills for competitiveness, employability and workforce development to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU economy. Stakeholders and Member States will participate in its preparation by means of an **expert group** designed on the model of the European e-Skills Forum. The group will advise the Commission and work also

on projects in the fields of e-skills and e-learning. These projects concern:

- § Development of e-skills foresight scenarios in Europe;
- § Benchmarking policies and initiatives in support of e-learning in Europe;
- § Survey of e-business skills in Europe;
- § Development of a European e-competence framework;
- § Benchmarking e-skills multi-stakeholders partnerships;
- § Development of a European ICT skills and career portal.

Meetings of the group will be organised in June and November 2006 in Brussels and at the European e-Skills Conference on 5-6 October 2006 in Thessaloniki. A final meeting will be organised during the first quarter of 2007. The European Commission would prepare a policy communication with an action plan, to be adopted in early 2007. It would be followed by a complementary initiative on e-inclusion in 2008, which was announced in i2010, and the adoption of the European Qualification Framework.

Actions (tentative list at this stage) could include:

- § Monitoring the supply and demand of e-skills. This will need to take account of the impact of global sourcing on jobs and occupations. e-skills classifications, statistics and foresight scenarios will need to be regularly updated to support dialogue and policy formation;
- § Developing a reference framework for e-competence. This should be in line with the emerging European Qualification Framework and promote new guidelines for curricula and efficient co-operation between industry and universities;
- § Increasing market transparency for industry training and certificates on e-skills.
- § Promoting quality standards for mutual recognition of training and for the transfer of credits between formal and industry-level training;
- § Developing a European portal for ICT skills and career, linked with existing websites of Member States and of industry.
- § Promoting role models, job profiles and career perspectives, particularly among young people;
- § Encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships and joint initiatives of ICT companies on topics such as employability. It will also be necessary to identify and promote appropriate legal and financial frameworks for multi-stakeholder partnerships;
- § Promoting training resources in e-learning and e-skills and the networking of e-learning and training centres;
- § Informing and encouraging the e-skills community. Instruments could include a periodical newsletter and conference to discuss progress.

In this context, the **European e-Skills 2006 Conference** will constitute an important milestone toward the design of a long term e-skills strategy at EU level.

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European e-Skills Foresight Scenarios

By Matthew Dixon, SKOPE, Oxford University

The European Commission has awarded a contract for a one-year study on foresight scenarios for e-skills within Europe to a consortium led by CEPIS (Council of European Professional Informatics Societies) involving PREST (Centre of excellence for Policy Research on Engineering, Science and Technology at the University of Manchester), and Eurochambres (Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry). The PREST team (Professor Ian Miles and Dr. Lawrence Green) have very extensive experience in technology foresight work, and in particular they led the foresight element of the FISTERA project (Foresight on Information Society Technologies in the European Research Area) led by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies of the EU Joint Research Centre[1] based in Seville.

Straightening out the world of e-skills is a key challenge. The importance is undeniable and there is widespread interest. However, a structured and valid factual basis for policy analysis at the European level is not easy to come by. A range of studies over recent years in EU Member States have thrown light onto various aspects of the issue, but there is still only a limited base of consistent evidence about the realities of the labour market for these skills and arrangements for their acquisition. In addition, the picture continues to change relentlessly as new ICT capabilities, products and services emerge. The e-skills foresight scenarios project will build on the recent work by Rand Europe for the Commission on the supply and demand of e-skills in Europe, which uncovered limitations of data availability and formulated concrete recommendations. The project will involve:

§ Interviewing and involving existing national forward-thinking teams and ensuring that their views and results are taken into account;

§ Identifying critical change factors and a range of 'wildcard' developments;

§ Conducting political, economic, social, technological and ecological as well as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analyses of future trends and developments;

§ Developing multiple foresight scenarios and examining what could emerge from foreseeable, 'wildcard' developments and structural changes and how these might affect the supply and demand for e-skills within the next 10 years; and

§ Providing early recognition of trends and new developments which may trigger important consequences and help in e-skills policy development and priority setting (notably for the promotion of employability, competitiveness, upward mobility and career prospects).

One of the key elements of establishing a valid model for the project will be to clarify the drivers that influence demand for the three types of e-skills: ICT Practitioner Skills, ICT User Skills, and e-Business Skills.

In principle demand for ICT practitioner skills arises from levels of ICT activity, both within the ICT supply industry (which can in principle be tracked with output indicators from the relevant NACE sectors) and within (IT departments in) user sectors. However the use of broad 'productivity' ratios to relate activity levels to employment levels that have in the past are no longer so reliable in estimating future demand, since the growth of off-shoring ICT work (significant in some Member States) breaks the direct link.

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[1] See http://fistera.jrc.es/ and http://www.mbs.ac.uk/research/engineering-policy/index.htm

While off-shoring developments are recognised as being significant drivers for this type of e-skills, the lack of comparative meaningful data on this poses problems.

Demand for ICT user skills relates to a large degree by levels of access (number of workstations/PCs) within sectors and economies. While installed base can be tracked reasonably well, estimating demand for future skill-raising brings of course the question of the state of skills/competence of the current workforce (in principle, new demand will fall away as the majority of the workforce achieve adequate competence with the main computing environments). However, various studies suggest that such saturation is a long way from being achieved, and indeed there is some evidence that even where basic competence is apparently in place, notable productivity differences can exist between countries or national business cultures.

Tracking and considering future developments in e-business skills involves a rather different approach. Here the issue is about effective exploitation of the potential of ICT for organisations, a management/leadership role as opposed to a set of individual skills/competences. The indicators of interest here therefore relate more to the number of businesses/organisations where such leadership is required.

While these considerations are important in relation to the development, operation, use and exploitation of ICT systems, the project will need, particularly for the medium-term thinking, to go well beyond the existing 'mainstream' ICT infrastructure. The foresight scenarios will need to explore areas where new enabling technologies, human and market responses to them, and other socio-economic drivers may change the face of ICT from what we know today. Some of those drivers are already known today – for example the growing functionality of hand-held devices show the strong trend to convergence of portable/mobile devices, the socio-economic implications of which we are only beginning to detect.

The requirement on the project to consider 'wildcard' development will ensure more open-minded thinking, but this will result in a growing complexity of what could emerge that will challenge our capacity to keep analysis and brainstorming within reasonable complexity bounds while endeavouring to cover the ground. The project has been designed in two phases:

§ e-skills Foresight Scenarios for the European ICT Industry, addressing possible developments and assessing its overall position in relation to skills in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The project's Interim Report, to be delivered in the late summer, will cover this initial focus. This first phase will be developed in liaison with the Task Force being set up by the European Commission on the competitiveness of the ICT Sector in Europe and ICT uptake.

§ Explorations of possible developments of the European e-skills base more broadly, picking up the perspectives of the user sectors and of the European workforce as a whole in relation to ICT. The Foresight Scenarios in this second phase will analyse the contribution of e-skills to the economies of Member States and of the European Union as a whole, and assess the overall position of Europe's e-skills base. The Final Report will be delivered early in 2007.

The project consortium is committed to finding ways to bring in all relevant thinking from Member States, and indeed to involving experts from national teams in the series of workshops.

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European Qualification Framework

By Jens Bjornavold, Cedefop

In July 2005 the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) launched a consultation process on a **European Qualifications Framework** (EQF). The proposed framework aims at introducing a voluntary mechanism making it possible to compare and translate between different qualifications systems and frameworks. The EQF proposes to introduce a set of **8 reference levels** which cover the entire range of qualifications from compulsory to doctoral level. These levels are described through learning outcomes and will provide a neutral reference point for national and sectoral qualifications frameworks operating according to different time-frames and institutional arrangements. By the end of the consultation period (December 2005) the Commission had received responses from 31 European countries covering national education and employment authorities, sector and branch organisations, social partners, educational institutions as well as non governmental organisations

Broad support to a European Qualifications Framework

In general, the EQF is seen as a necessary and relevant initiative able to contribute significantly to transparency, transfer and recognition of qualifications in Europe. There is broad agreement that EQF should become a common reference or meta-framework, first and foremost acting as a translation device at European level. There is a unanimous agreement that **the EQF should be voluntary**. The EQF can not be introduced through a top down decree; it will only work if it brings added value at national and sectoral level. If this is the case the EQF will be a success. The proposed 8-level structure is seen as broadly sufficient to cover the range of qualifications existing throughout Europe. Most respondents are 'able to live with' the pragmatic choice of 8 levels and see it as a good starting point for a common reference. The consultation responses illustrate that an important shift in perspective is taking place in European education and training policies. The strong support for learning outcomes is not only important for the development of an EQF; it can also be seen as a crucial element in the reform of national and sectoral qualifications systems**.** There is finally a strong emphasis on the need for quality assurance. The EQF will not function without mutual trust and mutual trust can not be ensured without transparent and robust quality assurance arrangements. These arrangements must be operational and visible at all levels – European as well as national.

Areas where further development will be necessary

The Commission proposal triggered an intensive debate on the consequences of an EQF on national education and training systems. It also triggered a discussion on how to move towards an operational framework. Two concerns are widely shared by those responding to the consultation:

§ There is considerable concern as to the clarity of concepts underlying the EQF proposal. This applies in particular to the definitions of concepts like qualification, competence and sector.

§ There is a widespread concern that not sufficient attention has been paid to piloting and testing of the EQF. This is a point which have to be addressed clearly by an EQF Recommendation

The majority of responses dwell on the need to simplify, refine and improve the reference level descriptors. It was from the outset clear that the definition of descriptors would become one of the main challenges in developing a EQF. The descriptors have to be sufficiently general to address the great diversity of qualifications in Europe but also sufficiently specific to be operational and relevant to end users. They must also be able to cover vocational as well as academic qualifications.

§ Important comments have been made on the distinction between knowledge, skills and competences; pointing out that this is a helpful but also an artificial distinction.

§ Comments are, in particular, directed towards the third category of descriptors in the proposal, 'wider professional and personal competences'. While admitting that this category covers many important learning outcomes, many respondents find the proposal to be overly complex and difficult to apply in practise.

National authorities acknowledge, in their responses to the consultation, that the implementation of a EQF will require substantial commitment and effort at national level. The large majority of countries signal that it will be necessary to develop a national qualification framework to be able to respond and relate to the EQF. There seems to be broad agreement that the following requirements have to be met by existing and future NQFs:

§ It must be based on learning outcomes.

§ It will require a 'self-certification' process supporting consistency and mutual trust.

§ It will require the inclusion and acceptance of all national stakeholders, not only in education and training but also involving the labour market.

§ It will require integrated systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

§ It will require robust transparent and trustworthy quality assurance mechanisms.

We can observe a wide-spread concern by national qualifications authorities that the development and promotion of international sector based "qualifications" could reduce transparency, threaten quality and undermine mutual trust towards publicly recognised qualifications which are the responsibility of national education and training authorities. The opposite position is represented by a number of sectoral organisations and associations arguing that the rapid changes in markets and in technology require European or international qualifications and that these should be supported by an EQF.

Towards a formal agreement on an EQF

Based on the responses to the consultation the Commission is now (Spring 2006) preparing a formal EQF proposal to be presented to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in September 2006. This proposal will contain simplified reference level descriptors as well as indicate the main elements in an operational EQF. The Commission has also, in parallel to the preparation of a formal decision launched a call for proposals inviting national authorities and sectoral organisations to develop projects to test various aspects of the EQF and thus contribute to the development of a framework relevant to all users.

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European e-Competence Framework

By Burkart Sellin, Cedefop[2]

The establishment of a European wide ICT Skills Framework, its goals and the way forward has been proposed and discussed by the European e-Skills Forum and was promoted at the European e-Skills Conference in September 2004. This became the focus of the CEN/ISSS workshop on ICT skills co-chaired by Cedefop and CEPIS.

The subject was substantially brought forward in 2005 and lead to a CEN workshop agreement **"European ICT Skills Meta-Framework: State-of-the-Art Review, Clarification of the Realities and Recommendations for Next Steps"**, which was formally approved in February 2006 and published electronically under the Number CWA 15155/2006[3]. It contains an overview of current approaches to ICT Skills frameworks and a proposal for a European level approach.

Initial activities produced two CEN Workshop Agreements: CWA 14925 on "Generic ICT Skills Profiles for the ICT supply industry" (March, 2004), and CWA 15005 on "ICT Curriculum Development Guidelines for the ICT supply industry" (May, 2004) both being reviews of the Career Space work performed by a consortium of 11 leading ICT companies[4].

Following up the recommendations of the European e-Skills Forum, the CEN/ISSS ICT Skills Workshop broadened its stakeholders' base and focus its attention beyond the professional roles considered by Career Space to examine the field in more depth at all skills/competence levels.

The main areas of development have arisen from recognition and analysis of the range of existing ICT skills/competence frameworks; the range of different purposes for which such frameworks have been developed; the different types of relevant frameworks (e.g. for practitioner skills, for ICT user skills, and for learning curricula); the particularly high rate of change within the field of ICT, driven by waves of new enabling technologies, the resulting approaches to work organisation, and the resulting lack of stability of skills classification structures; and finally the need to ensure adequate consistency with emerging European frameworks of relevance, in particular the proposed European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications for regulated professions[5].

This involved a considerable amount of work from experts and stakeholders from both sides of the industry, universities and professional bodies, who have been actively involved since the conclusion of the ICT Skills Workshop's first phase.

The issues at stake are complex and challenging. This CEN Workshop recognizes that progress towards the "ideal scenario" of a European ICT Skills Framework of what could rather be termed **"e-Competence framework"** is aspired to by many who are active in this area. This CEN Workshop has worked to find a proposition which is strengthening the contribution of ICT skills to achieving the strategic "Lisbon goal",

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[2] Chairman of the ICT Skills workshop established by CEN/ISSS

[3] http://www.cenorm.be/cenorm/businessdomains/businessdomains/isss/cwa/ict-skills.asp.

[4] www.career-space.com

[5] Since there is no regulation of practice of ICT practitioner work within the European Union, this Directive published in September 2005 is currently of less direct relevance.

while retaining the support of key stakeholders and employers of ICT practitioners in an environment that has still to achieve maturity and stability.

The main conclusions are that:

§ It seems feasible to establish and agree descriptors for levels of skills and competences for ICT practitioners and professionals, which are based on descriptors for outcomes of education and training on the one hand and linked to the lines of the European Qualifications Framework as proposed by the European Commission on the other.

§ The profiling of necessary skills and competences per level and jobs or careers was seen as being more difficult despite the existence of former agreements on broad job profiles. The competence or skills models in each country and sometimes depending on the individual company do not only differ but change at a high speed depending on the purpose and level of detail needed. However there was agreement that the European level effort to come to a common profiling and to define further (horizontal) specifications of competences and skills should be intensified and continued. By this effort more actors and stakeholders from major national or company or sector frameworks should be involved.

A new phase was successfully started in Brussels at CEN premises on 15 March 2006 and the members unanimously approved a new business plan update[6].

The meeting agreed the following statement of objectives for the work programme:

§ Develop a **European e-Competence[7] Reference Framework** which will support the development of European Qualification Framework.

§ Ensure that the framework supports human resources activities in resource planning and career/ competence development.

§ Help individuals to develop and to maintain employability.

§ Promote use of the framework particularly in types of enterprises where current lack of use reduces productivity and increases risk.

§ Support training providers in developing and maintaining education and training provision.

Regular review meetings will be held to monitor progress on the respective activities and ensure continued attention is given to the agreed objectives.

The timeline for this activity is 2006 and 2007. A new CWA should be produced by end 2006. CEN/ISSS projects will be supported by the European Commission in the context of its support to standardization activities in relation to i2010 and the Lisbon strategy.

A dedicated session will be organised during the European e-Skills 2006 Conference to discuss about progress and future developments in this field.

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[6] http://www.uninfo.polito.it/WS_ICTSkills_3rd

[7] e-Competence is the broader term encompassing both the ICT practitioner and ICT user, as well a e-business skills.

European Alliance on Skills for Employability

By Elena Bonfiglioli, Microsoft EMEA and eSCC

A new multi-stakeholder alliance to promote e-skills for employability partnerships

Launched in January 2006, the "European Alliance on Skills for Employability" is a new initiative by the members of the **"e-Skills Certification Consortium"**, Cisco Systems, CompTIA, EXIN, ECDL, and Microsoft - together with Randstad and State Street Corporation and supported by a growing number of other stakeholders like EAEA, FIT etc.[8]

The Alliance was formed in **response** to the call for action by the European Commission and many Member State governments for close collaboration between the public and private sectors to invest in practical programmes that will help generate more and better jobs in Europe's knowledge economy. It is a concrete contribution to two of the recommendations presented in the report of the European e-Skills Forum report "e-Skills in Europe: towards 2010 and beyond" which called "to promote European multi-stakeholder partnerships on e-skill" and "to foster e-skills in the workforce and in population at large".

The Alliance's goal is to put a clearer spotlight, through our own programmes and our contribution to policy dialogue, on the provision of employability skills training that will help Europe's unemployed people, older workers and people with disabilities to become more employable and economically active. Together the Alliance partners will invest in cash and kind over the next five years in a range of programmes and partnerships for technology access, training, content and certification in IT and other business skills needed by present and future employers. With each Alliance partner contributing its core competencies, programs and resources toward a common goal, trainees will gain access to training in ICT and business tools and practices used by local employers, and the confidence, certifications and support systems to look for new jobs or start small businesses. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for skills and training offer the potential to bridge gaps amongst industry, education institutions, governments and civil society. In addition they respond to the call by the July 2003 daft EU Constitution to stimulate "cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms" to "facilitate adaptation to industrial change"[9].

The need for increasingly effective multi-stakeholder initiatives was reinforced in the international symposium on the strengthening of "e-skills capacity-building" held at El Kram on November 16, 2005. The event, which was organized by the e-skills certification consortium (e-SCC) and the European Commission, focused on how industry with the support of governments and civil society can strengthen e-skills capacity building by taking advantage of the different resources available, public - private partnership can make the information society a reality.

The provision of new skills and economic opportunities also has a clear competitiveness dimension, shown by the initiative of President Barroso and the European Council to create a Global Adjustment Fund to help retrain and relocate 35,000 to 50,000 workers a year when jobs are lost to the dynamics of global trade. Retraining workers

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[8]   http://www.e-scc.org/alliance

[9]   Article III/183 and eSCC Hamburg Declaration of 24 October 2003
      http://www.comptia.com/sections/publicpolicy/documents/Hamburg_Declaration.pdf

is crucial to ease the structural adjustment under way in many industries. A study conducted recently by AICA[10] in Italy, entitled "the cost of ignorance", demonstrates that the lack of computer literacy in the workforce is costing the Government approximately €15.6 billion a year. Another survey recently conducted by the NHS in UK shows that if basic ICT training were provided, people would save over half an hour a day in performing their tasks. European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity, Dr Vladimir Spidla, welcomed the launch of the Alliance, saying "The Alliance is a leading example of how innovative business to business collaborations, working with different stakeholders, can provide opportunities to the European unemployed. Access to skills training, content provision and certification can help older workers, people with disabilities and the young to face the challenges of unemployment and the changing workplace and so contribute to Europe's prosperity. I commend this initiative as it represents one of the best practices in this field."

A comprehensive approach to skills training partnerships

Working with government, industry and NGO partners across Europe the Alliance will be extending existing partnerships and building new ones that aim to support and assist:

- § Today's untapped work force – unemployed youth who have dropped out of education and the over-50s who need new skills and confidence to find jobs later in life – to gain basic ICT skills for work and life through local community ICT training centres, ICT academies and online training;
- § Tomorrow's European knowledge workers – by bringing ICT skills into the main-stream of schools curricula with an emphasis on support and training for teachers, students and their communities;
- § Today and tomorrow's ICT professionals – by supporting universities and training colleges across Europe to provide first-class ICT diploma and degree education on the latest technologies;
- § By supporting Europe's 20 million small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – the heartbeat of the EU economy – by widening their recruitment base of local people able to use ICT as tools for business growth and innovation.

Referring to the challenges posed by an ageing population and the promotion of a life cycle approach to work, Günter Verheugen, Vice President of the European Commission and EU Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry welcomed this partnership based initiative by saying: "I welcome the creation of the European Alliance on Skills for Employability as a vehicle to drive employability, competitiveness and growth for the people of Europe. An example of Alliance members' partnerships for employability skills training is the Technology, Innovation and Initiative (TII) programme launched this year by the Technological Centre for the Textiles and Clothing Industries of Portugal (CITEVE) and Microsoft's Unlimited Potential initiative[11]. The UP-CITEVE programme is a three year initiative to provide several thousand unemployed workers in Portugal's textiles industry with new ICT skills and qualifications needed in the local economy, and practical support to find new jobs with local companies or start new businesses. The training will be provided at four community technology centres in an open-access environment led by expert community trainers teaching basic and advanced ICT and

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[10] Associazione italiana per l'informatica ed il calcolo automatico

[11] http://www.microsoft.com/emea/citizenship/digitalinclusion

related business skills needed in the local economy. As Portugal's companies adapt to increased global competition by moving into research and development, design, logistics and distribution, ICT-proficient workers are increasingly needed both in the textiles sector and proximate sectors.

Generating Dialogue, Engagement and Partnership

One of the benefits the Alliance brings to the dialogue, engagement and partnership with public authorities and NGOs on ICT literacy and professional training for the young, the disabled, older workers and other unemployed or under-employed people throughout Europe, is a good understanding about the skills and qualifications in demand inside business and the ability to learn from real and tested practice.

The Alliance members believe that sharing expertise and resources in this way is part of the essence of Corporate Social Responsibility, and that it makes good business sense to learn and adapt to local needs and challenges. It is also important to raise awareness among the population and extend partnerships with local governments and industry to reach people who need and want to gain these skills to improve their employability. We believe this multi-stakeholder partnership also working in partnership with the public authorities and community NGOs, to help better coordinate industry and community investments, services and other offerings, is one of the best ways to have an effective inroad into the skills divide and to help deliver sustainable growth, jobs and competitiveness in Europe. The Alliance welcomes interest from potential new members and partners in our work.

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The Global Digital Literacy Challenge [12]

By Geoff Mc Mullen, CEPIS

Experts from academia, industry, education (including significant NGOs – UNESCO and GESCI) and commerce exchanged knowledge and experience over a day and a half of intensive discussions about the directions in which digital literacy is moving worldwide and the directions in which it perhaps should be going.

During the meeting, participants explored four specific subtopics:

- § Can skills development keep pace with rapid technological change?
- § Building a multi-stakeholder approach.
- § What should our goals and milestones be?
- § How can this be achieved?

Participants broadly agreed that what is really needed for a person to deal with rapid technological change is the ability to learn how to learn, to develop **sustainable skills**.

To build a multi-stakeholder approach will require **sustainable structures, which exist only incompletely**. Goals and milestones are hard to define in the absence of a

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[12] "The Global Digital Literacy Challenge: A Call to Action" was the title of a symposium, held on 6 and 7 March 2006 at St George's House, Windsor Castle, hosted by ECDL and CEPIS.

clear definition for 'global digital literacy' itself, but might start by finding out where we are now, what mechanisms already exist for establishing standards, what the most basic skills of GDL might be and how to motivate people's interest in their own and others' levels of digital skill. To summarise the conclusions reached in conversation:

§ Digital literacy skills enable controlled human-machine interactions in order to use digital, multi-function systems to carry out everyday tasks in social, cultural, citizenship, educational and other contexts.

§ We cannot ignore the importance of critical thinking skills in this context.

§ A good deal of knowledge and activity (and targets) already exist which could usefully be brought together and coordinated.

§ Different communities require different skills levels and speed but this should not preclude shared standards and a common vocabulary.

§ If we can define what digital skills are needed for the individual to interact with the community, we can start to see what to teach in a curriculum.

§ Educational principles themselves need overhauling: motivation is key for both teachers and learners. The push of 'killer apps' and the pull of employment requirements both promote digital literacy

§ We would like to see statistics and figures to show where we are and what progress is being made for both geographical areas and social categories.

§ We ought also to keep an eye on the future with 'horizon-scanning'.

§ We need a sound business case. Common interests for the stakeholders include: cost reduction, efficiency, productivity, increase in creativity

In a final plenary session, participants discussed what action to take next. They agreed that people's needs and challenges in developing, maintaining and preserving GDL are not solved problems. Beyond or alongside the idea of a quantifiable 'digital literacy', we are interested in people's differing capacities and demands to deal with technology and also to handle information and employ communication skills.

Any framework for standards and education must be sensible and flexible. Outcomes for different populations will be different. Training and motivation need to be understood in context.

Sustainability is necessary both for skills and structures – in one sense, this means to maintain a population's current digital abilities while technology continues to change. In another, we need sustainable institutions to produce and run frameworks for education and validation of skills. Such institutions also need to be capable of accepting pro bono, government injections and then carrying on. Interesting work is already going on which might be followed up.

In summary, the chair suggested as an immediate action that participants remain in touch, share further their knowledge of what already exists and start to collaborate towards common interests outlined during the symposium. This implies some hard-nosed appraisal and then cultivation of businesslike alliances and clusters of interests based on fellow-feeling. He offered on behalf of CEPIS/ECDL to provide a secretariat to gather and distribute information towards the possibility of meeting again for further conversation. The meeting accepted both parts of this suggestion.

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Benchmarking e-Learning Policies in Europe

By Claudio Dondi, Scienter and MENON

The e-Europe and e-Learning initiatives launched by the European Commission have significantly contributed to the increased awareness and commitment of national and regional governments in supporting the development of a knowledge and information society in Europe. The European Council highlighted the crucial role of knowledge and innovation as the engines of sustainable growth towards a fully inclusive information society, based on the widespread use of ICT in public services, SMEs and households.

In this perspective, as from the i2010 initiative - A European Information Society for growth and employment: "a new era of 'e-business solutions' is coming, based on integrated ICT solutions, secure web-services and 'collaboration tools' to raise worker productivity. New developments indicate that the use of ICT will increase in the next years. It is also essential to adapt the working environment through efficient use of ICT in the workplace and for a flexible organisation of safe and high quality work"[13]

This implies the need to increase research, policy focus and coordination to support the implementation of actions aimed at making a meaningful and efficient use of new technologies in the workplace, by understanding the changes in terms of processes, competences and organization structures, thus inevitably deploying knowledge building through flexible and mainly technology enhanced learning – namely e-learning.

The European Commission organised the "eLearning 2005 Conference: Towards a Learning Society" on 19-20 May 2005 in Brussels[14] bringing together a cross section of the various stakeholders involved in e-learning in Europe. It was proposed to reinforce stocktaking and consolidate best practices across policy areas and to review and evaluate e-learning results in the broader perspective in 2006.

In this context, the Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General of the European Commission proposed to launch a benchmarking action of policies and initiatives in support of e-learning for enterprises.

The specific objective of the one-year study **"Benchmarking Policies and Initiatives in support of e-Learning for Enterprises in Europe"**, launched in May 2006, is to analyse and benchmark national and regional policies and stakeholder initiatives, in support of e-learning for enterprises and identify the most successful strategies for the promotion of good practice and the efficient use of e-learning in organizations and, particularly, the European enterprise sector.

MENON was selected to undertake this work after the publication of an open call for tenders.

The work will proceed in two phases and two reports will be delivered:

- § A report presenting a synthesis of the situation concerning the e-learning market in Europe and national and regional policies as well as stakeholders' initiatives in support of e-learning for enterprises (October 2006);

- § A final benchmarking report identifying and documenting at least ten best practices (April 2007).

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[13] COM (2005) 229 final

[14] http://www.elearningconference.org

When looking at growth rates of training in Europe (including "traditional" and technology-based training) a rather varied and fragmented picture emerges, between Northern and Southern European countries. Further to that, in Southern European countries in particular, fragmentation looks even more dramatic at regional level. Though traditional training remains the most preferred option, existing trends in the last years have shown an increased interest and adoption of e-learning solutions especially in large companies and – from a geographic point of view -, in Nordic countries, the UK, Germany and France.

However, a distinction needs to be made when studying the e-learning demand in enterprises between large companies and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Whereas large enterprises have been in fact forerunners in the adoption of e-learning throughout Europe in the last 5 years, the same cannot be said for small and medium companies, which have shown significant resistance to e-learning, showing in general limited interest in training as such.

As far as supply is concerned, the strong variety of cultures and languages are among the main inhibitors to the "Europeanization" of the e-learning industry. The evolution and progress of the available technological infrastructures and networks and the increased concern on quality of e-learning products and services are strong factors which may potentially lead to an increased adoption of e-learning throughout all sectors and segments of demand, though an essential role is played by policies in enhancing access, awareness and use of e-learning.

European and national programmes such as GoDigital have highlighted the importance of digital technologies and of the Internet, especially for Small and Medium Enterprises, though much of the attention has been paid to the promotion of e-commerce and/or e-business, without providing a consolidated set of empirical evidence and documentation of the corresponding changes in production and knowledge processes that are taking place in these organization agencies, implying the emergence of new sets of competences, to be systematically grouped and developed.

The outcomes of the work of the study on benchmarking national and regional policies as well as stakeholders' initiatives for e-learning in enterprises become therefore crucial in supporting policy - as well as decision-makers and stakeholders in promoting actions and initiatives facilitating the development of innovative, dynamic and knowledge-based enterprises throughout Europe. The recommendations will feed into the orientation of future actions in this field at EU level (i2010 and the successor of the e-Learning initiative and action plan) as well as national and regional level. It goes without saying that benchmarking policies in the field of e-learning will imply a strong focus on e-business skills and e-competences, constituting a condition sine qua non!

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European e-Skills 2006 Conference

By Franz Gramlinger, Cedefop

Following the European e-Skills Summit in 2002 and the European e-Skills 2004 Conference there will again be an important event this year: the European e-Skills 2006 Conference will take place on 5 and 6 October in Thessaloniki, Greece, in the conference facilities of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop).

It will be a major milestone in the preparation of a long-term e-skills agenda for Europe. The title of the conference is **"Towards a Long Term e-Skills Strategy".**

Organised by the European Commission and Cedefop in partnership with leading stakeholders and ICT companies, the conference will be the meeting point for experts and policy makers from EU governments, industry, social partners and academia.

Visit the website www.e-skills-conference.org of the event to see the draft agenda and regularly updated information. All interested persons are invited to **pre-register online until 30 June 2006**.

Because of the conference venue and facilities and as the event should be a place for discussions, exchange and networking **the number of participants is limited to 150**; therefore, pre-registration is mandatory.

We will inform all those who have pre-registered in the middle of July at the latest about the result of this phase.

The plenary session will cover the three main topics:

- § e-Skills in Europe: Towards a Long-Term Strategy
- § Global Sourcing, Job Creation and New Working Environment
- § e-Learning and Lifelong Acquisition of Skills

Three parallel sessions will be organised, covering:

- § European e-Competence Framework
- § e-Skills Certification and Training
- § Employability and Digital Literacy

A Conference Declaration will be discussed and adopted at the end of the event.

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Other important forthcoming events:

11-13 June 2006: **Ministerial Conference "ICT for an Inclusive Society" in Riga**
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/events/ict_riga_2006/index_en.htm

14-17 June 2006: **EDEN Conference "e-Competences for Life, Employment and Innovation" in Vienna**
http://www.eden-online.org

4-5 July 2006: **EU Presidency e-Learning Conference 2006 in Helsinki**
http://www.elearning2006.fi