



Report

Policies aiming to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed

Peer Learning Activity



ET2020 Adult Learning Working Group
September 2017
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Contents

1. Context.....	2
2. Work process and content of the PLA.....	4
3. Preconditions and factors for success related to policies on adult skills governance	8
Skills intelligence.....	9
Skills anticipation	10
Skills provision	12
Schematic overview of the preconditions and factors for success related to three policies for adult skills governance.	14
How to engage employers?	15



1. Context

The aim of PLA: by comparing and contrasting policies from three countries, to identify the essential conditions for success of policies aiming to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed by employers and employees

The aim of the peer learning activity (PLA) was to answer the question: “at a time when labour markets and a society are changing so rapidly; when it's hard to know what skills will be required tomorrow; when so few adults take part in learning, **how can policy best ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed by employers and employees?**”

This topic was identified by the Working Group as one that it had not yet addressed, and for which several countries could propose examples.

The PLA looked at three very different types of projects and policies: from Poland, from Portugal and Slovakia, and from Slovenia. By analysing, comparing and contrasting them, we sought to identify, with the information available, the essential conditions for successful policies.

The PLA addressed an issue that is not well covered in the literature yet, and has seldom been a focus of policy. The mapping of current national policies that promote skills learning in the workplace, that was conducted by the Working Group in 2016, focused on the provision of work-based learning for adults but not specifically on policies to align provision to the needs of employers and employees. The mapping indicates, as for all policy types related to work-based learning for adults,¹ two relevant emerging issues:

- **Monitoring skills development in the workplace:** In many countries, large numbers of employees have difficulties with specific basic skills, especially literacy skills. This is not always known by the employer or other institutions. In order to increase skills levels, first of all, it needs to be clear where there are skills deficits. This does not only apply to low-skills levels, but to medium and higher levels of skills as well: in order to facilitate training, it needs to be known where there is a need for it. This requires employers and employees themselves to do more on skills assessment, building skills portfolios and providing guidance on skills development, both for the benefit of the individual and the employer. Furthermore, at government level, there seems to be a limited overview of what training is going on in the companies, what the mode of delivery is, how training

¹ PES policies and programmes offered to job seekers; Government policies and programme on basic skills learning at the workplace; Policies and programme related to non-formal VET (incl. employer-driven programmes); Policies and programme related to the formal VET system.



stimulated is stimulated, what the content of training of is and how skills are recognised;

- **Tailoring learning to the needs of adult learners:** A major part of adult learning in the workplace is provided by IVET and CVET providers. It is not always said that the provision is sufficiently tailored to the needs and specific situation of adults. This depends on whether it is possible to integrate learning into the work schedule, and whether the course is relevant for the adult (in terms of direct use of the acquired competences).

In the field of skills anticipation and forecasting, there are important studies conducted by Cedefop. These studies, however, mostly relate to IVET and do not pay particular attention to the workplace learning of adults (see textbox).

- Cedefop (2014). 'Skill mismatch: More than meets the eye', Briefing note, March 2014;
- Cedefop, ETF, ILO (2015). The role of employment service providers, Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs VOLUME 4. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop, ETF, ILO (2016) Developing and running an establishment skills survey Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs VOLUME 5, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop, ETF, ILO (2016). Using labour market information, Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs VOLUME 1. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop, ETF, ILO (2016). Carrying out tracer studies, Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs VOLUME 6. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop, ETF, ILO (2016). Developing skills foresights, scenarios and forecasts, Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs VOLUME 2. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop, ETF, ILO (2016). Working at sectoral level, Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs VOLUME 3. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission (2016), Measuring skills mismatch, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union



2. Work process and content of the PLA

Basic information about PLA

This PLA was organised as part of the work programme of the Working Group on Adult Learning, within the framework of the Education and Training 2020 programme and the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

It took place from 13 to 15 September 2017 in Warsaw (Poland) in the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP). This institution is involved in the implementation of national and international projects financed from the structural funds, state budget and multiannual programmes of the European Commission. It particularly focuses on state policy with regard to enterprise, innovation and adaptability of staff.² In total there were 21 participants, from 11 countries (Iceland, Portugal, France, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, Latvia, Switzerland), mostly from ministries of education.

Unlike in the previous PLAs in Manchester (22 to 24 February 2017) and Reims (31 May to 2 June 2017), three quite different policies were offered for analysis by WG members, all related to the same broad area: adult skills governance. They highlight different aspects of a system that can help to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed by employers and employees. The three policies relate to:

- Skills intelligence
- Skills anticipation
- Skills provision

First day – introduction to PLA, the topic and the first policy (Poland)

During the **first day**, in the morning the participants were introduced to the peer learning methodology and the EU policy context and discussed different approaches to analysing policies. They also identified the differences between policy preconditions and factors for success:

- There are **preconditions that must be in place before a policy is implemented** (for instance to improve the alignment of adult learning provision to the needs of the labour market and society). In relation to these preconditions we might ask what needs to be in place for this specific type of policy with this specific objective? What kind of funding? What kind of legal base? What kind of plan? Who should be actively involved? etc.

²

<http://en.parp.gov.pl/>



- **Factors for success** are elements to which policymakers need to pay attention if they want to give a policy a good chance of being successful (effective). They **relate to how the policy is designed, developed and implemented**. So they concern the specific approach taken in relation to the objective. This concerns the question: how would this policy actually lead to the change envisaged?

In addition, participants' expectations for the PLA were discussed, gathered and synthesized. Based upon their countries' interests, the main expectation was to learn about successful policies and strategies.

More concretely, participants wanted to:

- **Share knowledge** about effective methods and innovative approaches on this topic (WBL and structured issues related to governance and engaging employers and employees with learning).
 - Identifying best practices that can be applied at MS and EU level in enterprise involvement;
 - Entrepreneurship training and training adult refugees (on the agenda in every country).
- **Build personal engagement and relationships** with peers from other countries;
- **Focus on SMEs** which, because of their size, often lack HR departments and policies: how to involve SMEs in assessing and monitoring their skills needs; how to engage them in more future (skills) orientation to contribute to their competitiveness; how to create a culture for training of employees (learning culture).
- **Learn about validation** of competences in the context of industry (important for both individuals (mobility) and companies (prestige, transparency and visibility)).
- How to respond to **fast changing labour markets**? How can WBL be used in this?

During the **afternoon of the first day** and the **second day** policies from Poland, Portugal and Slovakia, and Slovenia were presented and analysed.

Each policy example was presented following a standard template, highlighting its relevance to the topic of the PLA, and there was time for participants to ask questions for clarification. Following a set framework of questions, participants then discussed each example in small groups, after which there was a further plenary discussion with the presenter to tease out the main preconditions and factors for success.



After all the policy examples had been analysed in this way, participants recapped the main conclusions from each example, made connections between them and identified emerging common issues. These allowed the group to prepare the draft conclusions from the PLA and identify questions which should be asked to the companies during the round table session. During the meeting with companies the participants gathered more information on the topic from the viewpoints of specific enterprises. Next the group negotiated and agreed around key conclusions regarding what makes for effective policies.

The three policy examples can be summarised as follows:³

- **Poland (skills identification):** A large scale study on Human capital was presented⁴. The first edition of the survey ran from 2010 to 2014. The second edition is being implemented between 2017 and 2022. The budgets are €5 and 3.5 million respectively, funded through ESF. As skills are the drivers of a knowledge-based economy - they create jobs and attract investments - there was a felt need to improve the support provided for skills development and hence to have an updated account of skills needs in terms of demand and supply. The survey was based on three basic questions:
 - What are Polish employers' skills needs? (Demand)
 - What are the skills of the Polish workforce? (Supply of skills on the labour market)
 - How to overcome skills mismatches?

The surveys targeted employers, the general population, training and providers; sectoral research was conducted as well. The surveys are conducted every two years, with smaller mid-term surveys in between to track developments over time. The results of the surveys were intended to be used by key stakeholders: policy makers; practitioners (employers' organisations and HR, employees (trade unions), investors (foreign), HEIs (shaping curricula)); and scientists.

- **Portugal and Slovakia (skills anticipation):** The Portuguese presentation focused mostly on the System for the anticipation of Qualification Needs (SANQ). This aims to provide a better matching of qualifications at sectoral and regional level taking into account the

³ The presentations can be found on Yammer:

⁴ https://www.yammer.com/et2020workinggroups/#/threads/inGroup?type=in_group&feedId=7343631&view=all

<https://bkl.parp.gov.pl/>



past match and anticipated future balance between supply and demand. It consists of three components: diagnosis (evolution of the labour market linked to professions and qualifications. Importance of the qualification in the regional labour market); planning (forecasting volume of employment in relation to a given qualification) and regional in-depth analysis (municipalities' task to identify developments and identify priority areas for skills development). There is a broad stakeholder base at national, regional and local level. The anticipation takes place at qualification level. This initiative is embedded in a range of skills-development frameworks such as the National Qualifications System; the National catalogue of qualifications; the Qualifica centres (new opportunity centres) focusing on Recognition of Prior Learning; establishment of 16 Sector councils for qualifications. The development of the SANQ is supported by ESF.

- The Slovak presentation discussed the role of the National Qualifications Systems to stimulate the involvement of stakeholders and employers in the development of qualifications and to synchronise the supply and demand for qualifications. In addition, as in Portugal, sector skills councils are established (24).
- **Slovenia (skills provision):** The Slovenian presentation highlighted two initiatives. The first concerned an ESF supported project to stimulate cooperation between adult education and businesses; it provides a guidance service for employees. The objective is to improve the basic and vocational competences of employees who are less well educated and less qualified, with an emphasis on those over 45 years of age. The project is implemented through 15 regional centres and 18 regional providers. The second concerned "Career platform for employees" (CPE). This is a model enabling forecasting skills needs (sectors, companies, labour market), identification of skills gaps, fulfilment of gaps related to existing VET offer and timely development of "tailor made" programmes that meet the skills needs. It provides consultancy to businesses to identify long-term goals and identify the skills needs of company employees. It also supports HR staff to develop career-planning. This project is also supported by ESF. The methodology of this project is already more broadly applied in the Competence Centres for HR Development



Third day – additional input from employers

During the **third day**, the group heard evidence from two Polish employers: Intercars and B&B Promotional Sweets. Intercars is a company that imports and distributes automotive spare parts for passenger cars and commercial vehicles. It also has (as franchise) car workshops and provides them with equipment and tools. Intercars provides training for car mechanics and has received funding from the ESF and the Erasmus+ programme. B&B Promotional Sweets, a small family-owned company, informed the PLA participants about the challenges they face in finding people with the right skills and in providing training for employees to obtain the right skills. This SME is supported in thinking more strategically by the PARP.

Based on input provided by the PLA participants and the discussions with the employers, a closer look was given to a factor that was felt to be of key importance: how to engage employers in skills governance (whether it is skills identification, anticipation or provision). Some reflections on this aspect are presented in the final chapter.

As a final activity, PLA participants met in their country pairs to identify key messages they could take home from the PLA to their specific national contexts as inspiration for policy development in adult skills governance related to work-based learning for adults.

This concise report will not present the detailed discussions that took place. The conclusions reached are set out in chapter 3.

3. Preconditions and factors for success related to policies on adult skills governance

For each policy analysed, a set of preconditions and factors for success factors was identified. As the policies are very different, no attempt was made to unify them into a single set of preconditions and factors for success. The following sets of preconditions and factors for success should hence be understood as elements that were considered important in relation to a specific type of policy. In this it is important to keep in mind that these elements do not provide an exact ‘blueprint’ for what needs to happen in a country: the country context plays a vital role in situating the elements identified; for example, countries with a more



top-down tradition in policy making and implementation in the adult education area might emphasise different aspects compared to countries that have a more liberal and cooperative tradition in policy development and implementation. Also, the identification of the preconditions and factors for success can be based on positive examples from the policies studied, or negative ones, whereby the PLA participants identified a potential weakness in the design and implementation of the policy.

Skills intelligence

Preconditions

- **Plan how results are to be used and by whom:** When designing the survey, the starting point should be how the results will be used by different stakeholders. This should inform what kind of information is gathered and how it is communicated to the different end users.
- **Establish government support and political will:** In order to run such large scale surveys for a long period of time, there needs to be government support and willingness to make effective use of the results of the survey
- **Establish sustainable funding:** Surveys of this kind are costly and only have value if they run for the medium or long term. For this reason sustainable funding needs to be found. A reliance on funding from non-national sources (such as ESF) may not meet these conditions.
- **Embed the research in broader (strategic) frameworks:** the use of the survey results should be planned in advance in strategic frameworks and policy development processes to ensure that it impacts on policy making.
- **Engage stakeholders by showing them direct results:** Stakeholders need to see direct results so they understand how skills intelligence can benefit them.
- **Establish continuity in conducting the research:** one-off surveys have limited value; in order to be relevant for policy makers and stakeholders (e.g. employers) developments over time need to be identifiable.

Factors for success

- **Ensure that the results are directly usable for all stakeholders:** The skills intelligence should provide results which are relevant for the



different stakeholders. This means that the data should allow different analyses and aggregations.

- **Design and implement a solid, good quality methodology (representativeness, quality questionnaire, ability to differentiate for regions, sectors):** the survey should be based on a well-documented and solid methodology to be reliable and robust over a period of time.
- **Use network and targeted communication channels to disseminate and promote data (no dissemination gap):** The way the results are communicated and the channels for communication should allow the stakeholders to make direct use of the results. This can increase their engagement and involvement in surveys and skills intelligence.
- **Ensure that data is comparable across the years:** The methodology needs to be adaptable to changing needs, but should also allow comparisons across years to show developments in skills supply and demand.

Skills anticipation

Preconditions

- **Build up political will independent of political changes (e.g. changes of government):** In order to build qualifications frameworks and anticipatory skills systems political will is needed, preferably from all parties. These processes take a long time and should be sustainable, for example in case of a change of government.
- **Establish sustainable funding:** As results do not come directly from these systems (but over a long period of time), it is necessary to establish long-term sustainable funding. This can be based on ESF funding, but also on national budgets.
- **Establish a coherent governance system involving all stakeholders:** The functioning of a skills anticipation system relies on all relevant stakeholders seeing the benefits and being sufficiently engaged.
- **Align with the context (different labour markets, different strategy):** A skills anticipation system or qualification framework needs to operate in a specific national context, with a specific character of the labour market. This context needs to form the basis of the system design.
- **Embed the system in legal frameworks:** At some point the skills anticipation system and the qualifications frameworks need to be



embedded in a legal framework, as these are policies that shape the education and labour market systems.

- **Build up engagement of employers (convince them):** These systems can only function when they build upon the engagement of employers. It is not enough to invite them to participate in meetings, but to convince them that being a partner in these developments is beneficial for them.
- **Allow time to establish the system:** As indicated, establishing such systems takes time and results might not be immediately visible; hence there should be a long period for implementation.
- **Show results to all parties to increase engagement:** Although results might not be immediately visible, it should be the objective to identify and show results as early as possible as this will be one method to increase engagement of stakeholders.
- **Establish trust between stakeholders in the system:** Related to government, any system in this area should be built on trust between stakeholders.

Factors for success

- **Include a forward looking dimension in the system:** an anticipatory system should include a forward looking aspect so that policies (of governments, or employers) can respond to emerging trends and developments.
- **Set up well developed workflows and coherent systems:** A skills anticipation system involves different stakeholders at different levels. For that to work effectively, the work needs to be coherently designed and described so that roles and responsibilities at each stage are clear.
- **Involve stakeholders in a network-based strategy, also at regional level and work in communities:** A skills anticipation system should involve different stakeholders at different levels. These stakeholders need to be kept close to the system. This can be facilitated by a network-based strategy where different 'linking-pins' have the responsibility to support a part of the network.
- **Negotiate results and skills needs in a partnership approach involving all stakeholders:** in skills anticipation the results are not purely research-based, but are negotiated between stakeholders. This is because the future supply and demand is also dependent on the role the stakeholders play in influencing the demand and supply.



Reaching agreement on the balance of supply and demand creates ownership in solving potential problems.

- **Mandate an agency/body to voice the strong role of adult education:** As these systems generally cover other education sectors besides adult learning, the voice of adult learning should be clearly heard by a representative body.
- **Ensure that the learning outcome approach is applied in curriculum development:** In order to communicate about skills needs, employers and the world of education should use a common language. The learning outcomes approach is a language that can be used at both the supply and demand side.
- **Establish quality standards and assessment culture in training provision:** The skills anticipation system can only function if training providers can effectively anticipate the identified supply and demand and can do that with quality skills provision and assessment tools.
- **Ensure that the system is flexible and responsive to emerging needs:** The anticipation system needs to be able to react to changing needs and timely translate that into a suitable training offer.
- **Support decision making at all levels (shared competences and responsibility): enable organisations to take responsibility):** the anticipatory system should allow flexibility at the regional level as labour markets differ per region. This should be supported by decision-making processes involving the right (regional) stakeholders.
- **Set up a marketing strategy for different stakeholders (seeing results, changing culture):** Different stakeholders have different needs in terms of results, how results are presented and how they are communicated. Therefore, different communication and marketing strategies are required.

Skills provision

Preconditions

- **Establish a clear vision with clear objectives: what kind of change in employee qualification do we want to see:** The skills provision needs to be based on a vision of how companies can be supported in improving employees' competences and how this benefits the companies and employees.



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- **Establish cooperation and coordination between ministries, companies and other stakeholders:** skills provision in work-based learning can relate to different ministries, training providers and stakeholders and the cooperation and coordination between them needs to be well developed.
 - **Secure sustainable funding:** any skills provision needs to be based on secure funding to be able to gain a position in the country. This can start with ESF, but should include national funding as well.
 - **Convince companies that it is in their interest (If company sees the benefit, money is not an issue):** by showing results, companies should be convinced that skills improvements lead to benefits at company level. If they are convinced of this, getting them to (co-) finance skills provision is easier.

Factors for success

- **Design and implement a thorough methodology to identify needs and apply different approaches to individuals and companies:** the skills provision needs to be based on a tailored offer to companies and employees and hence needs to be based on a thorough needs assessment.
- **Link the guidance with the companies and use business language:** The guidance for skills provision should be provided in the language businesses understand to engage them more.
- **Monitor impact on the individual, company and sector (to learn and show results):** collective evidence of results and impact at different levels is essential to convince other employers to be susceptible to skills provision.



Schematic overview of the preconditions and factors for success related to three policies for adult skills governance.

To identify policy approaches to ensure that workplace learning provides the skills needed by employers and employees

How responsive is the provision to adults (incl. workbased learning) to changing labour market needs?

Skills intelligence (PL): role in research in improving provision and strategic planning.

Towards evidence-based policy making

Preconditions:

- Establish government support and political will
- Establish sustainable funding
- Embed the research in broader (strategic) frameworks
- Engage stakeholders through showing direct results
- Establish continuity in conducting the research
- Plan how results are to be used by whom

Factors for success:

- Ensure that the results are directly usable for all stakeholders
- Design and implement a solid and quality methodology (representativeness, quality questionnaire, ability to differentiate for regions, sectors)
- Use network and targeted communication channels to use and promote data (no dissemination gap)
- Ensure that data is comparable across the years

Skills anticipation (PT, SK): role of frameworks in ensuring provision is aligned with the needs

A systematic approach to ensure that provision is responsive to needs through engagement of stakeholders

Preconditions:

- Build up political will independent from political changes (prepare for change of government)
- Establish sustainable funding
- Establish a coherent governance system involving all stakeholders
- Align with the context (different labour markets different strategy)
- Embed the system in legal frameworks
- Build up engagement of employers (convince them)
- Allow time to establish the system
- Show results to all parties to increase engagement
- Establish trust between stakeholders in the system

Factors for success:

- Include a forward looking dimension in the system
- Set up well developed workflows and coherent systems
- Involve stakeholders in a network-based strategy, also at regional level and work in communities
- Negotiate results and skills needs in a partnership approach involving all stakeholders
- Mandate an agency/body to voice out the strong role of adult education
- Ensure that the learning outcome approach is applied in curriculum development
- Establish quality standards and assessment culture in training provision
- Ensure that the system is flexible and responsive to emerging needs
- Support decision making at all levels (shared competences and responsibility: enable organisations to take responsibility)
- Set up a marketing strategy for different stakeholders (seeing results, changing culture)

Provision (SI): Company guidance in identifying skills needs and providing (tailored) training

Through outreach to companies develop tailored training offer

Preconditions:

- Establish a clear vision with clear objectives: what kind of qualification change of the employee do we want to see
- Establish cooperation and coordination between ministers, companies and other stakeholders
- Secure sustainable funding
- Convince companies that it is in their benefit (If company sees the benefit, money is not an issue).

Factors for success:

- Design and implement a thorough methodology to identify needs and apply different approaches to individuals and companies
- Link the guidance linked with the companies and use business language by consultants
- Monitor on impact on the individual, company and sector (to learn and show results)

Low, and medium skilled



As can be seen, even though the policies examined were very different in scope and nature, several common themes emerged, such as the need for sustainability and the adoption of a long-term perspective (whether regarding political support or financing), the need to involve as wide a range of stakeholders as possible both in planning and in implementing policy, and the benefits of securing the active engagement of key actors, especially employers.

How to engage employers?

Although no attempt was made to cluster the preconditions and factors for success further (as then it would lead to abstract messages), a particular aspect was considered key in all three policies analysed: how to engage employers in the skills governance system to lead to a relevant work-based learning provision? The following ‘steps’ were identified that can support the engagement of employers:

- Step 1: be able to show results (or in order to start, have a feasible storyline how the approach leads to results). Plan in advance how the approach is of benefit for the stakeholders.
- Step 2: Speak the language of the main stakeholders and apply a targeted marketing and communication strategy.
- Step 3: Through results, deepen the engagement with all main stakeholders:
 - Employees,
 - Employers,
 - Government.
- Step 4: Through engagement, establish a coherent and inclusive governance model.
- Step 5: Secure funding (through government funding, EU funding, or company contributions).
- Step 6: Monitor impact to show results.