

Briefing note on actions taken by the social partners in relation to new skills needs

August 2009

Introduction

In the work programme of the European Social dialogue in the Hospital Sector for 2008-2010, EPSU and HOSPEEM made a commitment to address the challenges arising from new skills needs. It was decided to work towards a joint initiative on the basis of the cross-sectoral Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications. The social partners agreed to collect and exchange practices and experiences in the field of education and training, management of healthcare, and interaction between technology, ICT, skills needs and/or workforce planning and assessing the consequences of the different developments for work organisation and workers, with a special focus on education and training, skills mix and healthcare management.

At the Plenary meeting in December 2008, EPSU and HOSPEEM further agreed to develop a social dialogue instrument either in the form of a framework of actions or guidelines. The instrument should cover skills mix, leadership in the hospital sector at all levels and in all areas and workforce planning at macro level. In order to define the scope of the instrument and the possible actions to take, a technical preparatory seminar was planned in spring 2009 but was postponed and will be held on 16 September 2009.

Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications

In March 2002, the ETUC, UNICE and UEAPME adopted the Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications to respond to the “rapid pace of change” and the challenges posed by the 21st century. The agreement focused on four priorities: i) identification and anticipation of competencies and qualifications needs; ii) recognition and validation of competencies and qualifications; iii) information, support and guidance; and iv) resources.

New Skills for New Jobs

The European Commission launched a new initiative in 2008 called New Skills for New Jobs aiming to upgrade skills and ensure a better match between the supply of skills and labour market demand. In its communication, the Commission highlighted several factors that would stimulate demand for higher skills: globalisation and increased international trade, the transition towards a low-carbon economy, the application of information- and communication technologies, and changes in work organisations. At the same time, the mismatch between job seekers and vacancies would increase the need to improve the matching of skills. In addition, demographic changes will influence labour supply as well as future skills needs. In the Commission’s forecast, the labour force will continue to increase until 2020 due to a higher participation rate of women and older workers, but thereafter decline albeit larger migration flows. In 2020, 75 per cent of jobs are expected to be in services. Healthcare and social work is together with business services, distribution, personal services and hotels and catering considered as the sectors with the best prospects of job creation.

In order to anticipate skills and labour market needs, the Commission stated that it would take measures in four areas, namely addressing mismatches, strengthening capacity for forecasting and anticipation, deepening international cooperation and mobilising community instruments.

European Workforce for Health

At the end of December 2008, the Commission published a green paper on the European Workforce for Health with the purpose of promoting a sustainable health workforce. Among the challenges identified by the Commission were the ageing population, the impact of new technology and the threat of communicable diseases, which together would lead to continually increasing spending on health. According to the Commission, the EU population aged 65 and over would increase by almost 70 million between 2008 and 2060. To respond to these challenges, the Commission emphasised the need for an efficient and effective workforce. The green paper proposed a number of actions to address the demography issue, the diversity of the health workforce, the weak attractiveness of jobs in the healthcare sector and the migration of health professionals.

Both EPSU and HOSPEEM submitted comments on the green paper. EPSU also commissioned a briefing paper on the European workforce for health by Jane Lethbridge of Public Services International Research Unit on the. Although EPSU welcomed the green paper, it was criticised for being insubstantial.

Future scenarios in the health and social services sector

In 2008, the Commission commissioned a study “Comprehensive Sectoral Analysis of Emerging Competences and Economic Activities in the EU” to examine the need for new skills in a number of different sectors. For the health and social services sector, the study presented three different scenarios in the period 2008 to 2020 based on the assumption that an ageing population would increase demand for health and social work and decrease labour supply. However, as has been pointed out by Janet Lethbridge, the study has taken a market based approach to services without acknowledging that population needs may be better served with a more planned approach to health and social care.

In the first scenario (Care central) technological developments will help to accommodate the increasing demand for health and social services. New technologies will substitute skilled and unskilled labour. However, regulation is supposed to be sub-optimal and the labour market inflexible. In the second scenario (Care gap), technological developments will increase the demand for care thus straining the system resulting in growing waiting lists and high demands for labour and budgets. In the third scenario (Flex care), the labour market is flexible and will help to accommodate the increasing demand for care. The increase in demand is smaller because regulation increasing efficiency is implemented.

For all scenarios, managers are expected to need more technical knowledge and e-skills. Problem solving and self management skills are particularly important in Flex care, but also in Care gap. Coaching and team building are other skills that will be more important in the future.

As managers, medical doctors will need more technical knowledge and e-skills. They will also need good communication skills in order to understand customers and patients, analytical skills for problem solving, creativity to cope with problems in complex organisations, planning to minimise waiting time and lists, coaching and team building to optimise team capacity and quality management to guarantee health care quality.

Health associate professionals will need e-skills to deal with the increasing role of information and communication technologies and internet, technical knowledge, communication skills, intercultural skills to deal with the increasing diversity in society and quality management.

For nursing and midwifery staff, decreasing birth rates together with an ageing population will shift demands and tasks from midwifery to care of elderly. In nursing, increasing specialisation will go along with increasing differentiation of tasks. Also nursing and midwifery will need more e-skills, technical knowledge, skills in communication and quality management, and intercultural skills. Furthermore, they will need social perceptiveness and flexibility as healthcare providers are searching for ways to optimise the care process.

The demand for social workers will increase in all the scenarios. Social skills will become more important, such as networking, language and intercultural skills. Coaching and team building will also become necessary because of increased complexity when more disciplines are working together.

The new skills needs for low-educated workers will be limited. Nevertheless, social skills will become more important, such as social perceptiveness, communication skills and intercultural skills. Because of rapid technological development, jobs are expected to become more qualified decreasing the demand for low-educated workers.

On the basis of these scenarios, the report made the following recommendations:

- Intensified co-operation between relevant stakeholders ;
- Investment in human capital;
- Investment in e-skills and technological knowledge;
- Investment in social skills;
- Division into care and cure tasks;
- Split of managerial and contextual work for medical doctors;
- More entrepreneurship training for specific groups;
- Streamlining of health systems;
- Awareness of the effect of regulation not only on volume but skills;
- Improvement of working conditions; and
- Incentives to attract older workers.