

Executive Summary

The governments of OECD member countries have begun to acknowledge the importance of upgrading the human capital of those workers trapped in low-skilled, low-paid and often insecure jobs. As Chapter One indicates, the rationale is threefold.

First, many countries are experiencing *skill gaps and shortages*: in specific industrial sectors, employers cannot find suitably qualified workers. As economies restructure, relocating production in countries with lower labour costs, there is a strong pressure to upgrade the skills of low-qualified workers on the domestic market so that they can fill vacancies for more qualified jobs and fuel economic growth.

A second reason is *the desire to increase productivity*. Higher productivity improves the position of firms on the global market, attracts inward investment and promotes job creation. Differences in productivity across countries are often explained by differences in skills and educational attainment. Recent economic studies have revealed a significant correlation between investment in the human capital of low-qualified workers and a country's future growth and labour productivity.

A third important driver is that the workfare programmes implemented by numerous OECD governments since the 1990s have led to the creation of a vast category of workers in *low-paid employment* involving harsh working conditions and offering few social benefits, often referred to as the “working poor”. This kind of reintegration is clearly not a sufficient condition to alleviate social exclusion or poverty in a sustainable manner. The high incidence of poverty among working households suggests that policies emphasising job placement must be supplemented by measures to improve employment retention and enhance upward mobility. Current employment trends underline the importance of this third factor: it is becoming increasingly difficult for those occupying entry-level jobs to “move up the ladder” in terms of pay, conditions and security. And because of their peripheral position in the labour market, these workers are particularly exposed to the risk of losing their jobs through economic restructuring.

Tackling market and governance failures

The under-provision of training for the low-skilled workers has called attention to a gap between the public employment service and the vocational training

system. While the former has few resources to follow up those who obtain a job, the latter brings few benefits to low-skilled workers. Lack of co-ordination between the two means that in many countries the government does not provide any assistance to skills upgrading. Such upgrading is thus not only a policy issue but also an organisational issue. Hence both a market failure and a governance failure must be tackled.

It is at the local level that the effects of these failures are felt most directly, and where the need for complementary measures is voiced. The difficulty faced by enterprises in recruiting staff with the requisite skills spurs local labour market actors to offer education and training opportunities to the local incumbent workforce. As a result, a great number of local initiatives have emerged in many countries and regions, aimed at filling the gap between labour market reintegration and training programmes. A range of actors and agencies lead these initiatives: local authorities, trade unions, community-based organisations, labour market intermediaries and area-based partnerships. They draw on instruments and funding sources made available by various tiers of government, and through the European Union in the case of EU member states. Some countries have also recently launched pilot programmes.

As solutions to fill the training gap for low-skilled and low-paid workers have been designed at the local level, it is on that scale that the OECD LEED Programme has focused its *Study on Skills Upgrading for the Low-Qualified*. The project explores the question of how local and regional policies intersect with national training systems to deliver innovative, custom-made training programmes targeted at the working poor and their employers in specific occupations, sectors, cities and regions. It analysed the instruments and mechanisms used by local partnerships and other organisations in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The second chapter examines key challenges and institutional determinants. It begins by defining the nature of workforce development and skills upgrading initiatives. It is stressed that they address a more modest objective than lifelong learning, that of improving the skills, competencies and qualifications of low-qualified incumbent workers as a response to skills shortages and gaps felt in local labour markets and within organisations. Skills are related to the supply-side concept of employability: individuals can offer assets ranging from basic skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT and foreign languages) to vocational qualifications, to “soft” skills such as appearance, communication and teamworking. These skills may be acquired formally or informally, so that the scope of upskilling initiatives is wider than the traditional continuous education and training (CET) measures that mainly provide vocational and technical competences.

Skills polarisation has increased as the economies of the OECD have restructured, with the growth of high-skilled managerial and technical jobs paralleled by a growth in low-skilled service sector jobs. This trend is compounded by the fact that low-educated adults participate less in learning than their highly educated counterparts.

Generally, policy makers use training and skills upgrading instruments to address the barriers of cost, time and access. The chapter groups these into three broad categories: 1) employer oriented, 2) worker oriented and 3) assessment related. (These are of course not mutually exclusive and may be addressed simultaneously.) The first category includes training levies enforced through government legislation, subsidies to employers, symbolic rewards, and sectoral programmes providing tailor-made training packages. The second category includes training leave schemes, job coaching, individual training allowances, accounts and vouchers, and job rotation. Assessment-related instruments include identification of skills needs by regional agencies and the validation of non-formal learning.

The chapter examines the governance of workforce development; special attention is paid to the creation of new workforce development agencies (WDAs) and the role of workforce intermediaries. In particular, it discusses the ways in which skills upgrading can be harnessed to local economic development strategies through the provision of information and intelligence; regional skills alliances; social partners' involvement in programme design and advocacy; brokerage from partners in the educational sector; and supranational programmes such as EQUAL in the European Union.

On the basis of this evidence, the chapter makes a series of recommendations for policy makers. It stresses that skill needs must be anticipated through regional skills observatories, and that training must be promoted in the workplace through vigorous information and communication campaigns. Moreover, training – this is never stressed enough – needs to be carefully tailored to the target group and to the workplace, in terms of both content and delivery methods. This means hiring educational consultants, workforce intermediaries and fellow tradesmen as tutors. Of prime importance is the need to convince employers that investing in the training of their workforce will benefit their business performance. At the national level, governments will need to consider making the right to training for all categories of workers a legitimate policy objective, and to adapt their legislation to develop and redesign training levies in order to discriminate positively in favour of low-qualified workers.

Finally, the chapter recognises that workforce development is only part of a broader educational agenda and that initial education must provide opportunities to all children and young people. Unless schools, universities

and educational institutions succeed at reinventing themselves to become more inclusive and prepare future generations for the world of work, all efforts to upgrade the skills of low-qualified workers will be in vain.

An emphasis on educational planning in Denmark

The book then turns to a series of in-depth empirical examinations. Chapter 3 seeks to identify the preconditions for successful education and training initiatives for low-skilled workers in Denmark. Drawing on the case studies of three Danish enterprises, it illustrates the proper circumstances for adopting competence development strategies in the workplace.

The chapter begins with an overview of recent Danish policy developments in the field of adult vocational education and training. Denmark has a long-standing tradition of offering a favourable environment for upgrading the skills and competencies of the low-qualified. A specific feature of such policies is that they aim to promote employment and economic growth. The public system for both mainstream vocational training and adult education operates under the strong influence of the social partners. Since the 1990s, several reforms have increased provision for adults at all levels. In particular, a reform in 2001 produced two new programmes for the low-skilled: Preparatory Adult Education (*Forberedende VoksenUddannelse*) and Basic Adult Education (*Grunduddannelse for voksne*).

The case of Storstrøm, a region situated in the southern part of Sealand, and the islands Lolland and Falster, sheds light on the role played by the Regional Labour Market Council. Alongside programmes for unemployed people, the Labour Market Council finances job rotation programmes as well as education and training plans in three selected private sector companies, working in partnership with vocational centres. The experiences and outcomes of the companies (an electronics firm, a textile company and a ferry operator), all located in the Storstrøm region, are then examined. The experiences differ as do the motives for adopting education and training, but the companies do display similarities, such as the reliance on brokers as a means of getting things going. The author concludes that the initial barriers faced by employers and low-skilled workers – and the resulting inertia – can be successfully overcome through a combination of proper preconditions and a well-devised strategy of educational planning. Policy makers therefore need to ensure that employers are kept aware of educational offers.

*Regional implementation of the nationally designed
Employer Training Pilot in the United Kingdom*

Chapter 4 provides a thorough examination of the Employer Training Pilots (ETPs), a recent initiative of the UK government to encourage skills acquisition at the local level. It begins by mapping out the major policy initiatives in the United Kingdom over the last decade. There is growing concern that the country is falling behind its competitors in terms of productivity and economic performance, having had to cope with the social consequences of a relatively poorly educated and trained workforce. In England, one out of five adults has low or very low levels of literacy and some 48% have low or very low levels of numeracy (*i.e.* below the level expected of an 11-year-old). It is hence not surprising that skills are at the core of the Labour Government's labour market policy reforms, as illustrated by the creation of the Learning and Skills Council, the University for Industry, Centres for Vocational Excellence, and the Skills for Business Network which consists of Sector Skills Councils. Moreover, the government has encouraged the establishment of regional skills alliances between Regional Development Agencies, Business Link Operators, the public employment service and others.

The Employer Training Pilots were introduced in two successive phases from September 2002 to cover all 12 English regions by 2005. The initiative targets employers or employees who do not normally get involved with qualifications-based training. The offer includes four elements with some scope for local variations: free or subsidised training, paid time off for training, wage compensation, and information, advice and guidance to employers and employees.

The authors examine the implementation of ETPs in Derbyshire, a mixed urban and rural county in the East Midlands, and find that the main driver to participation appears to be the availability of free, brokered training, rather than the availability of wage compensation. However, the educational level at which the pilots are aimed means that they are more effective at tackling issues associated with social inclusion than economic regeneration issues, which may require different policies.

*Workforce intermediaries at the heart of regional
skills alliances in the United States*

Partnerships between businesses and non-profit organisations are crucial in attempting to upgrade the skills of low-qualified workers, as Chapter 5 illustrates. In the United States, workers with low educational attainment and little training are clearly at a significant disadvantage with respect to earnings

and employment. The median weekly earnings of college-educated workers are 73% higher than those of high school-educated workers, and the gap is even larger for those who dropped out of high school. Moreover, economic forecasts predict increasing shortages of qualified workers. Workforce development has thus become a critical issue for US policy makers.

An overview of training provision shows that programmes under the Workforce Investment Act are not targeted specifically or exclusively at low-wage workers. A number of state and local measures have been targeted to help low-wage workers overcome some of the barriers to receiving training services. Workforce Investment Boards, for example, use discretionary funds to train incumbent workers.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of two non-government workforce intermediaries. The Jane Addams Resources Corporation (JARC), located in the North Side of Chicago, provides the first case study. The JARC was created in 1985 to combine workforce development with economic development. Through a broad range of educational and training services, it helps small, locally owned manufacturers remain competitive and stay in the area in order to provide decent-paying jobs to local residents. The second case study organisation, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP), was established in 1992 in response to the dramatic shift away from manufacturing in the Milwaukee economy. The WRTP is the result of a partnership between AFL-CIO labour, employers, the University of Wisconsin and several other local actors. WRTP helps businesses and employees find solutions to their workplace problems. In addition to providing training and facilitation, it works with state and local policy makers to effect systemic change in the current workforce system. Although these workforce intermediaries clearly provide innovative and successful employer-driven solutions, the author concludes that the debate about whether they should supersede public services is not useful. Both approaches are needed and their efforts are complementary.

Drawing on EU instruments and non-profit organisations in Flemish localities

Chapter 6 examines a series of skills upgrading initiatives in Flanders, the Northern region of Belgium. It begins with an analysis of the Flemish labour market, which shows that participation is 79% higher for higher-educated workers than for the low-educated. On the demand side, although “knowledge work” has increased, almost one-fifth of the workforce holds a job that can be classed as “low-qualified”. A recent survey showed a 60% participation rate in lifelong learning for university graduates, against 4% for those without

qualifications. As in other countries, the underinvestment in adult education together with unequal participation in continued education and training provides a strong rationale for skills upgrading.

The Flemish government has recently adopted a number of initiatives such as the Job Rotation Plan, the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning and the accreditation of prior learning, all of which are indicative of the increased importance given to the workforce development agenda. Moreover, through so-called “diversity action plans”, the Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee – which brings together the Flemish government and social partners – has given support to firms that encourage internal labour mobility. Leverage grants, training vouchers and sectoral covenants are among the instruments available for human resource development.

Three local case studies – in the cities of Antwerp, Ghent and Diest – illustrate best practices from non-profit and private sector organisations. Some, like the non-profit organisation Vitamin-W, or the Jobcoach Network funded through the EQUAL Community Initiative, offer innovative skills upgrading initiatives to jobseekers and former welfare recipients. These NGOs try to foster sustainable labour market integration. Additionally, the case of Harol, a private sector company, shows how public sector agencies and actors can encourage employers to adopt Personal Development Plans for their existing staff.

However, as in many OECD countries where the workfare agenda prevails, measures to promote the development of the existing workforce remain secondary. In view of the unequal participation in lifelong learning that characterises the Flemish labour market, the authors call for a stronger regional or national strategic focus on low-skilled incumbent workers.

*The use of essential skills assessment programmes
in Canadian provinces*

The book ends with a presentation of several initiatives recently undertaken in Canada to reinforce the need and importance of basic, essential skills in the workplace. Chapter 7 focuses on cases involving employers who, in collaboration with community colleges, have used tools based on local labour market needs to upgrade the skills of their workforce. These tools were developed in part through initiatives of the federal government. The chapter begins with an overview of labour market and education trends. Education levels have steadily increased in Canada during recent decades. Today, one in two Canadians possesses post-secondary credentials, and 23% hold a university degree. As in other countries, individuals with less than a high

school diploma have low participation rates in training (11%, against 48% for university graduates).

The authors examine the main policies in the field of skills development implemented by both the federal and regional governments of Canada. Following the results of the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey, the federal government has put the acquisition of basic skills at the core of its workforce development agenda. Although federal funding does not support training directly, it does provide indirect support for subsequent training by helping partners conduct labour market research and develop career information and curricula. It launched its Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy (ESWL) initiative in April 2003 with the goal of enhancing the skill levels of Canadians who are entering – or who are already in – the workforce. Over 200 occupational profiles were identified as part of this initiative, and further profiles will be published by 2007. Furthermore, funding from Human Resources Development Canada led to the design of a Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES). The TOWES is an assessment tool for the three essential skills (reading text, document use and numeracy).

The chapter then provides detailed descriptions of how TOWES and other community-based skills upgrading initiatives such as Workplace Learning Centres have been piloted by several companies in two neighbouring case study regions, the Northwest Territories and Alberta. The conclusion highlights the value of flexible skills assessment programmes that can be tailored to the specific needs of incumbent workers and the organisations employing them.

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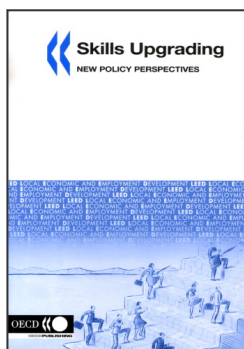
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Acronyms

AE	Adult Education (<i>Voksenuddannelse</i>) (Denmark)
AF	<i>Arbejdsformidlingens</i> – Name of the Danish Public Employment Service
AHRE	Alberta Human Resources and Employment (Canada)
AMU	Adult Vocational Training (<i>Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelserne</i>) (Denmark)
APEL	Accreditation of prior experiential learning (Flanders)
AVU	General Adult Education (<i>Almen VoksenUddannelse</i>) (Denmark)
AWES	Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (Canada)
BLOs	Business Links Operators (UK)
CEGEP	Collège d’Enseignement Général et Professionnel (Quebec)
CET	Continuous Education and Training
CPPI	Canadian Petroleum Products Institute
CTHRC	Canadian Trucking Human Resource Council
CVT	Continuing Vocational Training
DDMI	Diavik Diamond Mines Inc. (Canada)
ERIC	Effective Reading in Context (Canada)
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRP	Essential Skills Research Project (Canada)
ESWL	Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy (Canada)
ETPs	Employer Training Pilots (UK)
FOA	Public Employees’s Union (<i>Forbundet af Offentlige Ansatte</i>) (Denmark)
FVU	Preparatory Adult Education (<i>Forberedende VoksenUddannelse</i>) (Denmark)
GCSEs	General Certification of Secondary Education (UK)
GED	General Equivalency Diploma (Canada)
GVU	Basic Adult Education (<i>Grunduddannelse for voksne</i>)
HF	Higher Preparatory Examination
HHX	Higher Commercial Examination
HTX	Higher Technical Examination
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
JARC	Jane Addams Resource Corporation (US)
KAD	Women Workers’ Union in Denmark (<i>Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund</i>)

LIRI	Local Industrial Retention Initiative (US)
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LMDAs	Labour Market Development Agreements (Canada)
LSEq	Low Skill Equilibrium
LO	Danish Federation of Trade Unions (<i>Landsorganisationen i Danmark</i>)
LSCs	Learning and Skills Councils (UK)
MOWD	Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (US)
NNSP	The National Network of Sector Partners (US)
NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications (UK)
PES	Public Employment Service
RAR	Regional Labour Market Council (<i>Regionale Arbejdsmarkeds Råd</i>) (Denmark)
SERV	Flemish Social and Economic Council (Flanders)
SID	General Workers' Union in Denmark (<i>Specialarbejderforbundet i Danmark</i>)
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency (UK)
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
STC	Sub-regional Employment Committee (Flanders)
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (US)
TIF	Tax incremental financing (US)
TOWES	Test of Workplace Essential Skills (Canada)
UPL	Educational Planning (<i>Uddannelses Planlægning</i>) (Denmark)
VDAB	<i>Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding</i> – Name of the Flemish Public Employment Service
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VESOC	Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee (Flanders)
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VEUD	Adult Vocational Education and Training (<i>Voksenerhvervsuddannelse</i>) (Denmark)
VEU-reform	Adult Education Reform (<i>Voksen- og Efteruddannelsesreform</i>) (Denmark)
VUC	General Adult Education Centre (<i>Voksenuddannelsescenter</i>) (Denmark)
VUS	Act on Educational Support for Adults (<i>Voksenuddannelsesstøtte</i>) (Denmark)
VVU	Further Adult Education (<i>Videregående VoksenUddannelse</i>) (Denmark)
WIA	Workforce Investment Act (US)
WLP	Workplace Learning Program
WRTP	Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (US)



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