

AMS Standing Committee on New Skills 2009/2010

Report on the Results
of the Expert Groups



In October 2009 the Public Employment Service Austria (AMS) set up a Standing Committee on New Skills with the objective of making use of times when companies are characterised by weak capacity utilisation due to the crisis to prepare the labour force (employees in dependent employment as well as job-seekers) on time for coming changes and demands in connection with labour market-policy support measures.

The economic and financial crisis in recent years has made it clear in particular that changes and developments which could already be felt before the crisis are now gaining momentum again in the companies. A popular saying used in this connection is that »After the crisis is not before the crisis«.

The key objective of the AMS Standing Committee on New Skills is to keep pace with the skills and qualifications which will then be required by anticipating these developments at an early stage.

Within the Standing Committee so-called specialist groups are being set up, where experts from different occupational fields (»clusters«) identify specific short to medium-term skill and qualification requirements in several working rounds.

In the period between October 2009 and June 2010 work was started in the following clusters and three workshops each were held:

- machinery, motor vehicles, metal
- chemistry, plastic, new materials
- office and administration
- tourism and wellness
- construction and building ecology

From the discussions about technical or organisational developments, changes of materials or production techniques, as well as changes in customer behaviour, taste preferences or legal framework conditions, conclusions were drawn about skill and qualification requirements and concepts for new or changed continuing education and training programmes elaborated.

This report summarises the key results and recommendations of the clusters.

1. Decisive developments

Across all clusters there have been developments leading to general changes in service provision and in the forms of cooperation:

- Internationalisation: Increasing international competition, the shifting of labour-intensive manufacturing processes to countries with low salary levels, as well as increasingly close international cooperation and the accessing of new markets have manifold effects on the development of skills and qualifications.
- The technologisation and here particularly the steadily growing impact of information and communication technologies not only lead to further automation in manufacturing processes but also exert a decisive influence on day-to-day office and administrative work as well as change work processes and team structures.
- Tertiarisation: This not only relates to the importance of the services sector – an importance which has been growing for many years – but also the marked expansion of service competences in the production sector. Customer- and service-orientation, sales and distribution skills, etc. represent key factors of success for companies and staff in production.
- Ecologisation: Sustainability, energy efficiency, resource-saving manufacturing, recycling and ecologically sound disposal are only some of the key words which play a key role in performance processes and production methods and can, not least, lead to changes in the customers' behaviour.

For the required knowledge and competence these developments imply both growing requirements in terms of specialist competence and additional strengthening of social skills.

From this, a general necessity to obtain higher qualifications can be derived for all clusters and across all qualification levels. Whereas it can be assumed in the manufacturing sector that wage-intensive manufacturing processes are being increasingly shifted to countries with lower wage levels and that Austria, like the »old« EU member states in general, has to focus more and more on the

segments of development, highly specialised manufacturing and final assembly as well as services for regional markets, the requirements in the services sectors are rising due to increasingly more complex processes and team structures. Routine activities are being largely automated and project-oriented work is becoming more important. Cooperation in multicultural teams beyond company and country borders requires more intercultural skills and high levels of foreign language skills. In the contact with customers and guests, requirements are enhanced due to higher demands and growing quality awareness. Changes in the customer and guest structures e.g. in the tourism and wellness area also lead to new requirements there.

In addition, a large number of developments and innovations regarding production methods and materials can be observed in the individual clusters, which require new and additional knowledge and skills from the staff at all qualifications levels, starting with expanded skills in tasks in automated manufacturing (electronic controls, robot technologies, simulation technology and virtual work), processing and treatment methods (e.g. novel gluing and joining technologies), in handling hybrid materials, composite materials, and high-strength, long-life, especially light materials in the production sectors, to the proper handling of ecological construction materials and sustainable manufacturing processes.

2. Recommendations and strategies

To meet the current and future demand for skills and qualifications, there is a call for improving quality in initial education by responding more quickly to current changes and requirements, the urgent higher qualification of skilled labour as well as of unskilled and semiskilled workers, as well as updating the knowledge and skills of the employees and job-seekers who completed their training a longer time ago.

Only if all three areas – accompanied by a well thought-out lifelong-learning concept (permanent further and higher qualification for all) – are further developed and encouraged, will it be possible to meet the companies' demand for highly qualified staff and safeguard the employment opportunities of the workforce in a sustainable manner.

Alongside these developments, a series of challenges need to be tackled. These include the following:

- arouse the willingness to learn (willingness to take part in continuing education and training) and learn to learn
- safeguard skilled workers for the future by improving the image of technical occupations but also occupations in construction and tourism
- increasingly create networks between companies, cluster organisations, continuing education and training (CET) institutions, composite skills training schemes and AMS, particularly by involving small and medium-sized enterprises
- productive ageing: maintain the employability of older workers and safeguard knowledge transfer between generations
- create enhanced framework conditions for using CET e.g. at times of seasonal unemployment (course registration, time window, etc.) or for employees in shift work
- promote periods of work placement in CET programmes

- safeguard the required specialist trainers and technical resources by means of cooperation ventures with companies, schools, etc.

Proposals and recommendations to different addressees

The following is a summary of key recommendations made to some addressees:

Public Employment Service Austria (AMS)

- focus increasingly on specialist courses in the CET of job-seekers
- provide training in innovation for job-seekers and employees with outdated specialist knowledge
- increasingly support CET programmes for employees in dependent employment in the sense of preventive labour market and employment policy
- this requires moving away from compulsory day-time courses and complementing the AMS course offer by adding subsidised evening courses
 - in order to open up access to AMS courses to employees in dependent employment too
 - in order to enable participants to complete their CET programme who have found employment while attending a CET programme
- higher qualification programmes for the unskilled, i.e. extension of skilled workers' training in second-chance education
- improve composite skills training schemes as an opportunity for small and medium-sized companies
- standardised programmes throughout Austria in core areas as well as cross-border cooperation
- improve communication and information between AMS, CET establishments, companies, job-seekers and employees
- optimise the selection of course participants by providing educational guidance and career counselling and analysing potential

CET institutions

- expansion of modular programmes
- further development and intensification of new forms of learning: e-learning, blended learning
- stepped-up cooperation ventures with companies, schools, etc. in order to exploit their resources (trainers, laboratories, workshops, etc.)
- stepped-up cooperation ventures with cluster organisations and composite skills training schemes
- development of CET programmes in cooperation with companies
- optimise the selection of course participants by providing educational guidance and career counselling and analysing potential

Companies

- encourage the systematic further and higher qualification of staff at all qualification levels; particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises
- occupational coaching for young people and job entrants
- cooperation with universities and universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen) in research and development
- learning workshops – knowledge transfer

Education system

- intensify English classes at nursery school, primary school and vocational school
- develop modern job profiles and modernise existing ones
- improve vocational guidance at all schools
- improve school-based basic education in literacy and numeracy skills and promote social skills

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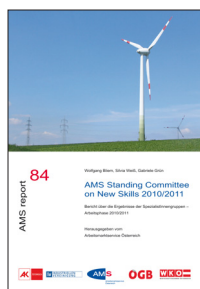
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