



Galerie Agora,
Rue du Marché aux Herbes 105, Bte 11
B-1000 Brussels
Telephone +32 2 285 46 60
Fax +32 2 280 08 17
Email: etf@etf-europe.org
www.etf-europe.org

European Transport Workers' Federation
Fédération Européenne des Travailleurs des Transports
Europäische Transportarbeiter-Föderation
Federación Europea de los Trabajadores del Transporte

KBC Bank, Rue d'Arenberg 11, B-1000 Brussels
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Training and Qualification Systems in the EU Port Sector: Setting the State of Play and Delineating an ETF Vision

Final Report

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Professor Peter Turnbull
Cardiff University
Colum Drive
Cardiff CF10 3EU
Wales, UK
turnbullpj@cardiff.ac.uk

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Executive Summary

This Report is based primarily on data collected via a questionnaire survey of eighteen ETF affiliated port unions from fourteen EU Member States, alongside secondary data and the contributions of participants at a workshop on “Training and Qualification Systems in the EU Ports Sector” (25-27 February 2009, Limassol Cyprus). The Report focuses on the provision of training for new entrants, re-training and the acquisition of new skills, state regulation, the funding of training programmes, trade union involvement in Vocational Education and Training (VET), and an evaluation of the approach of different stakeholders to port worker training. In addition, the Report includes a review of health and safety in EU ports, again with an emphasis on state regulation, trade union involvement, an evaluation of the effectiveness of health and safety procedures, and the approach of different stakeholders to the safety and well-being of the workforce.

On paper, training provision and the protection of port workers’ health and safety in EU ports appears comprehensive. But not all ports meet an acceptable standard and there are major question marks over the efficacy of port training and the enforcement of health and safety standards, especially in relation to new recruits to the industry. The starting point for any future EU policy in these areas should be the collection, and publication, of more systematic and ideally comparable data for all twenty-seven Member States. This should be just one obligation of a legal framework for training and health and safety in EU ports. Current inconsistencies in terms of both standards of protection and the enforcement of health and safety regulations within different Member States highlight the potential benefit of Community action in this area.

If progress is to be made on the idea of “mutual recognition” for qualifications in the European port transport industry, as proposed in the recent *Communication* from the Commission on a European Ports Policy (COM(2007) 616 final) then this must be based on the concept of “training quality standards” or “reference standards” and not “minimum standards”. Examples of best practice, which are included in this Report, can inform this process, with trade unions, employers and other interested parties making use of a more coordinated approach based on their own representative organisations (e.g. ETF, FEPORT and ESPO) and existing networks (e.g. the International Port Training Conferences) as well as future initiatives such as the Sector Social Dialogue Committee for ports. Coordinated training programmes that are anchored in a broader VET structure provide a best practice model for European ports and demonstrate the advantages of employers sharing the costs of training and development. This would benefit smaller and medium-sized port employers in particular. The failure of many of these smaller companies to invest in training and development suggests that a compulsory scheme may be necessary in some ports.

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Introduction

During the consultation on the Future European Ports Policy (2006-07) organised by the European Commission,¹ port worker training was a recurrent issue, as was the health and safety of the industry's workforce. All the different stakeholders recognised, and indeed advocated high training standards to ensure safe and efficient operations in European ports. This point was reiterated by the Commission in its *Communication on a European Ports Policy*² where it is also proposed that "a set of common requirements for training of port workers should be established at Community level."³ Such a proposal sits well with the Lisbon Agenda, which aims to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion." Vocational education and training (VET) is central to this vision of a socially based innovation society.⁴ It provides the basic skills, knowledge and technical abilities required by industry and wider society to support innovative work processes and the introduction of new technology, while at the same time meeting workers' needs for a safe and healthier work environment with opportunities for personal development and self-fulfilment.

VET constitutes an important interface between different policy areas – education, employment, economic and social policies – and provides opportunities for the social partners to cooperate in the design, development and delivery of high quality training.⁵ In its *Communication on The European Social Dialogue: A Force for Innovation and Change*,⁶ the Commission expressed the view that the sector level "is the proper level for a discussion on

¹ Six Workshops were organised to consider different areas of EU ports policy: (i) port services and the role of port authorities (Antwerp – November 2006) (ii) port financing (Hamburg – January 2007) (iii) sustainable development of port capacity, environmental issues, inter-port cooperation (Lisbon – February 2007) (iv) labour issues, cargo-handling, technical-nautical services (Valencia – March 2007) (v) logistics, hinterland connections, administrative issues (Naples – April 2007), and (vi) relationship with non-EU ports, transport flows, image of ports (Tallinn – May 2007).

² COM(2007)616 final.

³ This might be similar to the on-going work of the Inland Waterways Transport Committee where the social partners are developing an inventory of professional qualifications.

⁴ The aim of VET in the EU policy context is to produce a highly skilled and adaptable workforce, which is a primary objective of the European Union as set out in Article 150 of the Treaty.

⁵ The Copenhagen Declaration (2002) committed Education Ministers and the social partners to a cooperation process to ensure the success of the Lisbon strategy, which has been reinforced by the Maastricht Communiqué (2004), the decision in Helsinki (2006) to implement and further develop commonly agreed tools for promoting VET, and the Bordeaux Communiqué (2008) to review the priorities and strategies of the Copenhagen process. The Barcelona European Council (March 2002) gave a mandate to make European education and training a world reference by 2010, and to develop closer cooperation in VET.

⁶ COM(2006)341 final.

many issues linked to employment, such as ... vocational training.” At present, Europe’s ports are the only transport mode without a European Sector Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC), although one of the more positive outcomes of the port policy consultation process in 2006-07 (see note 1) is the stated intention of the social partners, with the full support of the Commission, to establish a SSDC for the industry. Agreements on VET and “life-long learning”⁷ are common in other sectors, including other transport modes (examples of joint opinions, declarations, procedural texts and agreements related to VET and life-long learning are presented in Appendix I). Health and safety and training have already been identified as important topics for the proposed SSDC for ports.

As a first step towards setting the foundations for future discussion and possible agreement on VET and life-long learning in European ports, and to determine whether the Commission’s desire to see “a set of common requirements for training port workers ... at Community level” is a realistic objective, the ETF determined to undertake a project on “Training and Qualification Systems in the EU Port Sector”, sub-titled “Setting the State of Play and Delineating an ETF Vision.” For several years, meetings of the ETF Dockers’ Section have discussed training and qualifications for port workers, noting the centrality of VET for any future European ports policy and highlighting the need for more focused, in-depth research to facilitate the wider dissemination of information on port-related training. To this end, the project aims to:

- 1) Broaden the activities already carried out by the ETF on training and qualification schemes in ports.
- 2) Gather together ETF members to deepen the debate and hold an exchange of views on the subject of VET and life-long learning, involving also training centres, employers’ representatives and institutions.

⁷ The Commission’s White Paper, *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, (COM (95) 590) defined lifelong learning as “the on-going access to the renewing of skills and the acquisition of knowledge.” Lifelong learning is a broad concept involving an individual’s education that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and places throughout life. The scale of current economic and social change, the rapid transition to a knowledge-based society, and demographic pressures resulting from an ageing population in Europe are all challenges which demand a new approach to education and training, within the framework of lifelong learning.

- 3) Compile an inventory of best practices to provide those Member States and Acceding Countries that do not have satisfactory training and qualifications systems in place with a useful instrument for their future activities.
- 4) Delineate a coherent ETF vision on training and qualifications in ports, also in view of the Federation's future participation in the SSDC on ports.
- 5) Investigate the need and feasibility of establishing a permanent network to exchange information on training and qualifications in ports.

To establish a solid empirical foundation for the project and to broaden the activities of the ETF on training and qualification schemes (point 1), the Secretariat launched a survey of affiliated unions who represent port workers. The results of the questionnaire survey, undertaken in 2008, were initially presented in the Background Document for the Workshop on “Training and Qualification Systems in the EU Ports Sector” (25-27 February 2009, Limassol Cyprus) (point 2). At this Workshop, invited speakers – including trade union officials, employers and representatives from the European Commission (DG TREN) – gave presentations on VET in a range of European ports and delegates had the opportunity to debate the results of the ETF survey and the more detailed accounts of training provision in specific ports/countries.

In this Final Report, the survey data and “good practice” examples from several ports/countries are reported alongside a broader discussion of the different systems of VET and life-long learning that can found in EU Member States (point 3). Rather than simply report the data as descriptive statistics, the analysis considers the data in the context of different models of port organisation and different systems of employment for dock workers (e.g. direct company employment vs. hiring from a labour pool). The latter will have important implications for the funding of training in ports (e.g. state vs. private sector), the nature and delivery of training (e.g. specific and dedicated skills vs. general and accumulative skills, national or port-wide provision vs. company-specific programmes) as well as the involvement of trade unions. Taken together, these differences have a strong influence on what is often referred to as the “skills eco-system”, the inter-locking networks of firms, markets and institutions that determine the provision of training.⁸

⁸ Finegold, D. (1999) “Creating Self-Sustaining High-Skill Ecosystems”, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 15(1): 60-81.

It is envisaged that the proposed SSDC for ports will provide a forum for the future development of training and qualifications in European ports, but it is important at this stage to establish the priorities of ETF affiliates (point 4) and the feasibility of utilising new or existing networks to exchange information (point 5). These and other issues raised during the project are discussed in the concluding section of this Report.

VET in the European Union

VET has a central role to play in Europe's endeavour to remain competitive and improve social cohesion (as per the Lisbon strategy). First, there is evidence of a direct link between training and company performance,⁹ especially in Southern European countries.¹⁰ Secondly, throughout Europe, the social partners have a formal role in developing VET policy and are also involved in implementation, particularly at sector and local (company and/or workplace) levels. Structures and systems of participation vary quite considerably across Member States,¹¹ usually according to the degree of state regulation and the locus of training.¹² Instead of state regulation, some Member States rely more heavily on the market to determine VET, while the locus of training might be towards training schools, at one end of the spectrum, or the workplace, at the other end of the spectrum. For example, whereas VET is regulated by the state in Germany and France, in the UK and Italy arrangements are market-led, with responsibility for training largely devolved to employers. In terms of its locus, VET is mostly industry-led and centred on the workplace in the UK and Germany, whereas training is education-led and centred on school in France and Italy. These differences can be illustrated in a simple typology, as depicted in Figure 1. Of course, arrangements in specific industrial sectors may differ from the national model, to a greater or lesser extent.

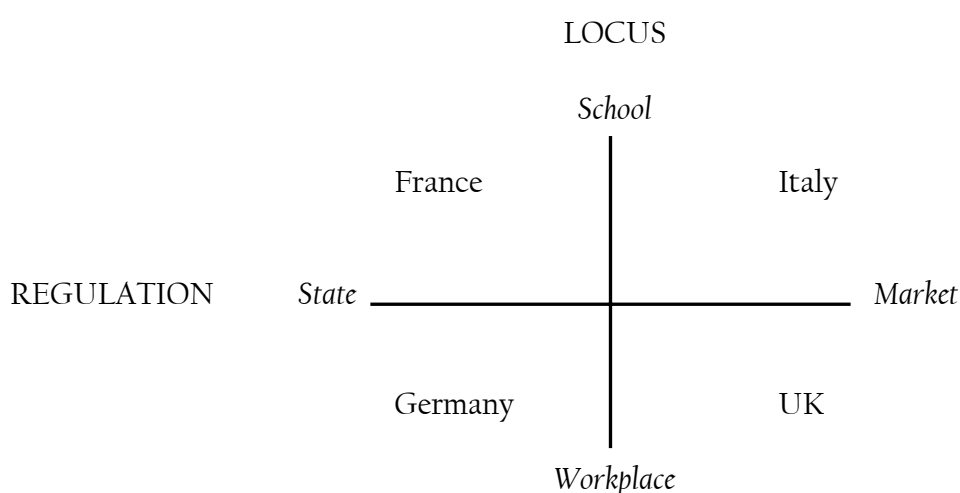
⁹ Bartel, A.P. (1994) "Productivity Gains from the Implementation of Employee Training Programs", *Industrial Relations*, 33: 411-25.

¹⁰ Apospori, E., Nikandrou, I., Brewster, C. and Papalexandris, N. (2008) "HRM and Organizational Performance in Northern and Southern Europe", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(7): 1187-1207.

¹¹ See, for example, Gierorgica, P. and Luttringer, J.-M. (1997) *The Influence of the Social Partners on Training at Enterprise Level in the Member States of the European Union*, Torino: European Training Foundation.

¹² Winterton, J. (2006) "Social Dialogue and Vocational Training in Europe: Are We Witnessing the Emergence of a European Model?" *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 30(1): 65-76.

Figure 1. A Typology of VET in Europe



Research indicates that state regulation and a long-term focus on VET appear necessary for effective social dialogue, although these conditions alone are not sufficient to guarantee the active involvement of the social partners.¹³ For example, the French system shares these characteristics with Germany, but VET in France is school-led and trade unions are poorly organised, which militates against meaningful social dialogue. The latter is also true of Italy, where the situation is exacerbated by a greater reliance on the market. The UK system is different again because it is market-led and VET is driven by a short-term focus, but unions are often well organised at the workplace which can create meaningful social dialogue at the local level. Examples of the involvement of the social partners in VET policy making are provided in Appendix II.

Financial support for projects designed to promote VET, improve social dialogue and share good practice is available,¹⁴ but the number of proposals submitted by trade unions “remains disappointingly low”.¹⁵ As expected, trade union involvement varies quite considerably between different Member States. Most notably, in countries with a tradition of state involvement in VET, there is usually a legal right for the social partners to be involved. This involvement can extend beyond their formal role in VET strategy to the implementation of

¹³ *Ibid.*

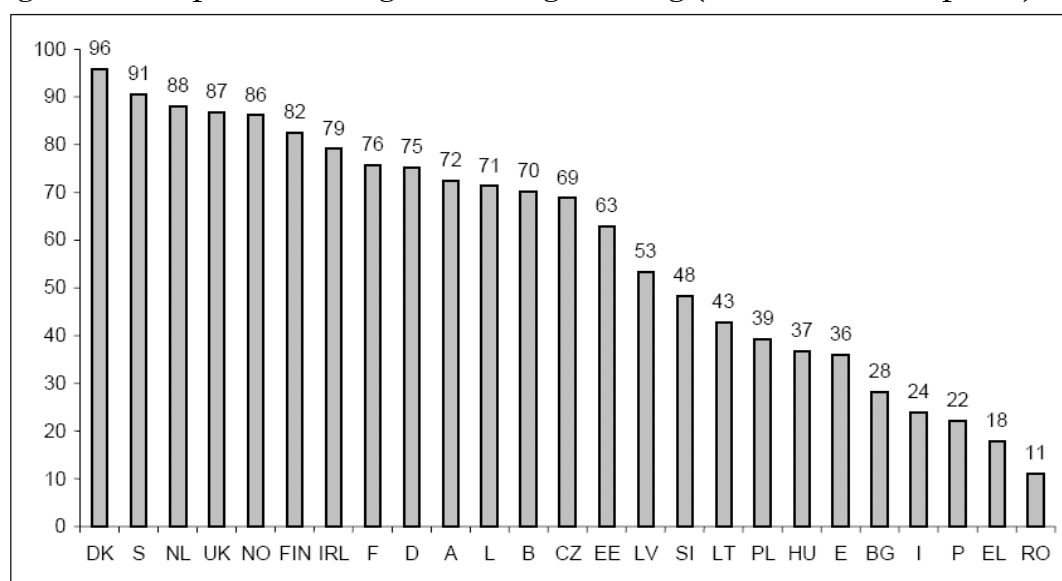
¹⁴ The Leonardo Da Vinci Programme, for example, adopted in 1994, is designed to contribute to the implementation of an EU vocational training policy. One of the projects funded under this Programme is “English for Dockworkers”, which involved the creation of self-learning training materials to support workers in the harbour industry in developing their English language skills. As the level of technology develops in the port sector, so does the need for comprehension of technical English (e.g. indexing and describing the main parts of a ship, roles of ship staff and the duties of supervisory staff, tools, accessories and stowage policies, stowage and goods handling). A virtual network has been created to allow workers in the field to fully access the developed English language course.

¹⁵ Winterton, *op.cit.*

VET actions, developing curricula and new qualifications, and developing on-the-job training. In Finland, for example, the social partners are consulted in the elaboration of national core curricula and as members of the Training Committees they have a further opportunity to influence curriculum content. In Belgium, the social partners are in charge of planning (defining objectives, target groups, trends) and implementation (application and follow up).

With the general trend towards “decentralisation” and more “voluntarist” forms of industrial relations in the EU, it is notable, perhaps inevitable, that individual enterprises have increased their own training opportunities in recent years. Data from the European Continuing Vocational Training Surveys (conducted in 1993 and 1999) highlight the massive variation in enterprise training provision across the EU, as illustrated in Figure 2. However, for the EU as a whole, well over half of all enterprises now offer continuing vocational training (CVT) courses (compared to 43% in 1993) and the proportion of employees who participated in CVT increased from 38% to 47% over the sample period.¹⁶

Figure 2. Enterprises Offering Continuing Training (as a % of all enterprises), 1999



Note: A – Austria; B – Belgium; BG – Bulgaria; CZ – Czech Republic; DK – Denmark; D – Germany; E – Spain; EE – Estonia; EL – Greece; F – France; FIN – Finland; HU – Hungary; I – Italy; IRL – Ireland; L – Luxembourg; LV – Latvia; LT – Lithuania; NL – Netherlands; NO – Norway; P – Portugal; PL – Poland; RO – Romania; S – Sweden; SI – Slovenia; UK – United Kingdom.

¹⁶ *Continuing Training in Enterprises in Europe – Results of the Second European Continuing Vocational Training Survey in Enterprises*, available at: <http://www.bibb.de/en/wlk7940.htm>. The average number of training hours per participant declined over the period of the two surveys, even though costs increased significantly.

The extent to which systems of VET rely on markets and/or institutions, involve trade unions or employee representatives in their development, and rely on financial contributions from the state as well as private employers are just some of the variables that help to define the skills ecosystem.¹⁷ The principal dimensions of the skills ecosystem, in addition to the institutional and policy framework already considered, are:

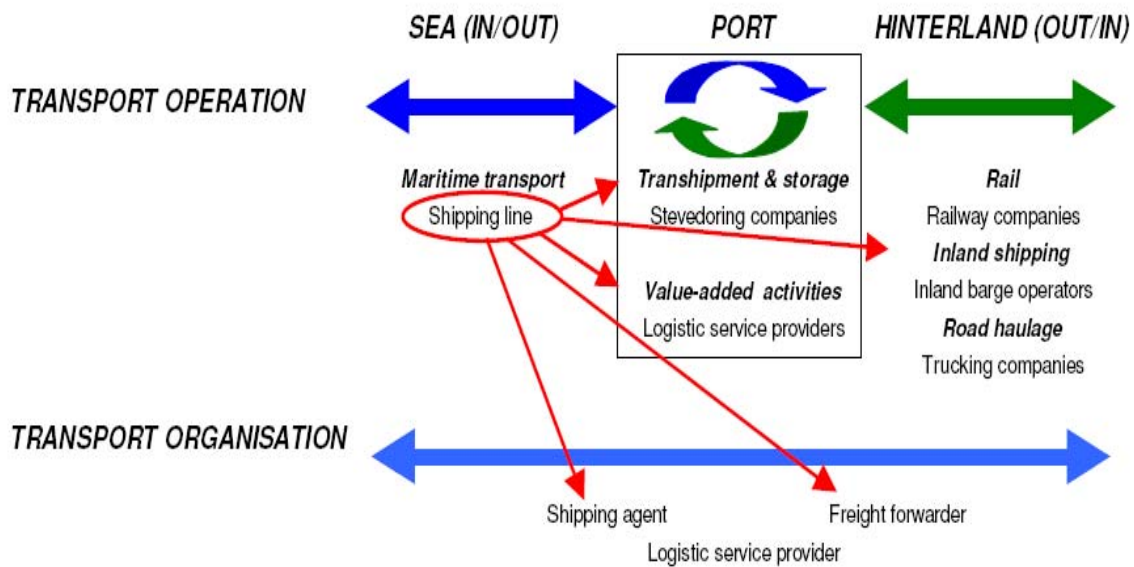
- Business setting
- Structure of jobs
- Level and type of skills
- Labour supply
- Predominant modes of engaging labour

In the port transport industry, the business setting will be influenced by the product market (e.g. the mix of general cargo, containers, short-sea shipping, etc), the competitive strategies of firms (e.g. the vertical integration of shipping lines into other transport modes to offer a “door-to-door” service) and the type of business organisations and networks (e.g. the emergence of global terminal operators such as DP World, Hutchison Port Holdings, PSA International and Eurogate). The vertical integration of shipping lines is illustrated in Figure 3 and raises the question of whether there should be coordination of training across different transport modes.¹⁸ As the business setting is now dominated by a handful of global terminal operators (GTOs) – the six leading port operators in Europe handled nearly 70% of total European container throughput in 2002, compared to 53% in 1998 – it is clear that GTOs will play an increasingly important role in the future training and development of port workers. This raises questions about the training policies of these companies compared to other organisations in the industry such as local/ private stevedores and public port authorities.

¹⁷ Finegold, op.cit.

¹⁸ These developments may require greater coordination within the trade union movement. For example, the ETF is involved in promoting the training of logistics workers through a joint programme with the International Road Transport Union (the corresponding employers’ organisation for the road transport sector) and there may be scope for other sections of the ETF to learn from this programme.

Figure 3. Vertical Integration by Shipping Lines



Source: Notteboom, T. (2007) "The Changing Face of the Terminal Operator Business: Lessons for the Regulator", ACCC Regulatory Conference, 26-27 July, Gold Coast, Australia.

The structure of jobs in the port transport industry, the level and type of skills formation, as well as the supply of labour, have been transformed in recent years as a result of organisational and technological change. These changes are summarised in Table 1. Clearly, the "competencies"¹⁹ required to perform the job of a dockworker have changed significantly as work on the waterfront has been redesigned, which in turn demands a new (professional) qualifications system.²⁰ This opens the industry to new sources of labour supply, most notably the increasing number of women who drive equipment, tally cargo and perform IT jobs in the operational control departments of major container terminals.²¹ One of the most important elements of the skills ecosystem in European ports has always been the mode of engaging labour, which has shifted from casual hiring systems to permanent employment. The system of employment, in combination with the general organisation of port activities, is examined in more detail in the following section.

¹⁹ Competencies can be defined as the knowledge, skills and know-how applied and mastered in a given work situation.

²⁰ "Qualifications" are the formal expression of the vocational or professional abilities of the employee. These qualifications will typically be recognised at the national and/or sector level(s).

²¹ In the port of Valencia, for example, more than 10% of dockworkers are now women. See Turnbull, P., Fairbrother, P., Heery, E., Martínez Lucio, M. and Stroud, D. (2009) "Women in Ports: Interim Report for the ITF/ETF", Centre for Global Labour Research (CGLR), Cardiff University.

Table 1. The Changing Nature of Port Work

From ...	To ...
General labourers	Multi-skilled/professional workers
Labour intensive operations	Capital intensive operations
Break-bulk handling	Specialised operations
Casual hiring	Permanent employment
Gang working	Team-work
On-the-job training	Certified training
Male (ageing) workforce	Diversified labour force

Port Organisation, Employment and the Training of Dockworkers

As indicated in Table 1, dock work was traditionally regarded as general, unskilled labour. Outside observers in particular often assumed that “any man in possession of muscle and sinew” was able to work in the industry.²² All the worker required, wrote Colonel R.B. Oram, was “‘A hook’ (to help the handling of bales and cases) ‘a bob’ (for the taking-on foreman) ‘and a four-letter name’ (that the foreman could write in his book on a wet morning).”²³ But even in the days of casual labour and break-bulk cargoes, work was highly specialised.²⁴ According to Sir James Sexton, although he might be considered by outsiders to be just a casual labourer, the all-round docker “required the intelligence of a Cabinet Minister, the mechanical knowledge and resource of a skilled engineer, and, in addition, the agility and quick-wittedness of a ring-tailed monkey.”²⁵ Dock work was indeed harsh and physical labour – accidents were a common occurrence²⁶ and deaths were all too frequent²⁷ – but it was also inherently variable, technically challenging and highly skilled.

²² Knowles, K.G.J.C. and Romanis, A. (1952) “Dockworkers’ Earnings”, *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics*, 14: 327-63.

²³ Oram, Colonel R.B. (1970) *The Dockers’ Tragedy*, London: Hutchinson. A “bob” or “shilling” (equivalent to 12 pence in current-day British currency) was the standard “bribe” or “kickback” to secure employment for the “half turn” (4 hours) under the old casual system of employment.

²⁴ See Lovell, J. (1987) “Sail, Steam and Emergent Dockers’ Unions in Britain, 1850-1914”, *International Review of Social History*, XXXII: 230-49.

²⁵ Sexton, Sir James (1936) *Agitator – The Life of the Docks* MP, London: Faber and Faber.

²⁶ Between 1955-67, for example, around 1% of the registered dock labour force in Britain was absent from work because of injury on any given day.

²⁷ Between 1947-74 over 500 registered dock workers in Britain were killed at work. After 1974 the National Dock Labour Board no longer reported figures for “deaths at work” separately from “all deaths”.

With the introduction of new technology, most notably containerisation, much of the variation has been removed as cargo is “unitised”, but employment levels still fluctuate and new skills are required. Driving skills are no less demanding than the physical effort associated with manual handling. Maintaining high levels of efficiency and service quality on a modern-day container terminal requires concentration, consistency, precision and effective communication skills.²⁸ Investment in physical capital must be matched by investment in human capital. Above all, terminal operators need to ensure the reliability of *all* their investments. Accidents, breakdowns or other stoppages can be very costly.

With the cost of ship-to-shore gantry cranes, straddle carriers, top-loaders and other equipment running to several million euros, it is hardly surprising that terminal operators prefer to employ regular, dedicated workers to operate such expensive equipment. High levels of efficiency are more easily sustained when port workers are familiar with the equipment, terminal layout, vessels, etc. Prolonged periods of driving, however, cause fatigue and loss of concentration, which threatens workers’ health and safety and the efficiency of the employer’s business. Rest periods and/or reallocation to other tasks is the usual solution. The modern-day port worker is not only highly skilled but increasingly multi-skilled.

Who pays for the training of port workers and how is VET organised in European ports? This will depend, in large part, on the national framework (discussed in the previous section) as well as the management and organisation of port activities. For example, under a “landlord model”, where the public port authority leases berths to private operators on a long-term basis, the terminal operator is more likely to develop in-house (company or workplace) training, with dedicated programmes for the specific operating system in place (e.g. rubber-tired gantry cranes vs. straddle carriers). Under a “tool port” model, where the public port authority invests in port superstructure (equipment) and well as infrastructure (berths, road and rail links, etc), training is more likely to be port-based rather than company-based, with the costs of training shared between the public and private sectors. If the entire port is privatised, as in the UK, then all training and development will be company-based, with little or no state support.

²⁸ See Finlay, W. (1988) *Work on the Waterfront*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Systems of employment, or “dock labour schemes”, will also have an important bearing on training. Under the landlord model, for example, terminal operators may prefer direct employment but this does not diminish their need for flexibility and access to additional labour to meet peak operating periods or “unsocial” hours (e.g. night shifts and weekend work). Where port labour pools exist, operators have access to additional labour to meet their daily operating requirements.²⁹ If these workers are multi-skilled, then the pool’s ability to satisfy requests for additional labour is greatly enhanced and the costs of their own operations are greatly reduced.³⁰ Operators will usually “share” the costs of training pool workers, either “up front” (*ex ante*) in the form of basic entry training plus on-going access to higher-level training programmes, or *ex post* via additional charges on the hourly wage rate of pool labour which is levied by the pool to recover the sunk costs of previous training.

As a result, differences between ports in terms of the organisation and funding of VET are only to be expected. Different models of port organisation and systems of employment will also have an important bearing on the level, scope and format of any trade union involvement in the design, development and delivery of port worker training. These differences are reflected in the ETF survey of affiliated port unions reported in the following section. An important point to note at this stage is that these differences should not dictate different standards, especially in crucial areas of training such as health and safety. Training standards should be high and universal.

²⁹ For example, Gesamthafenbetrieb (GHB), the Hamburg labour pool, is able to meet well over 90% of all requests for labour (by shift and skill) and provides over 50% of the operational companies’ labour at weekends. See Turnbull, P. and Wass, V. (2007) “Defending Dock Workers – Globalization and Industrial Relations in the World’s Ports”, *Industrial Relations*, 46(3): 582-612.

³⁰ In Rotterdam, for example, the labour pool was “privatised” in 1995 when the state discontinued financial support (previously the state shared the costs of guaranteed wage payments with employers in the port). By 1997, Stichting Samenwerkende Havenbedrijven (SHB), the new labour pool, was losing 1.2 million Dutch guilders per month and was effectively bankrupt, prompting calls by terminal operators for large scale redundancies. Instead, SHB embarked on a major programme of temporal and functional flexibility, with new shift patterns and new training programmes for pool workers. As a result, more than 75% of the pool was classified as “multi-skilled” by the end of the 1990s compared to less than 20% in the mid-1980s. Similar innovations allowed the labour pool for the ports of Bremen/Bremerhaven to reduce its idle time from a peak of 1,000 shifts per week in 1996 to just 1,000 per annum at the turn of the millennium. SHB became a victim of the current economic crisis and ceased operations in February 2009.

The ETF Survey of Training and Health and Safety at Work, 2008

It might be assumed that a useful source of information on training for European port workers is the *Factual Report* (2004) produced by ESPO³¹ as a follow up to previous studies published in 1977, 1986 and 1996.³² Amongst other topics, the *Factual Report* covers the “framework governing port management” and the “organisation of port services, financing and charging” in twenty-three European countries.³³ However, information on training is provided by only seven countries and most entries are rather cursory.³⁴ Consequently, in the absence of any systematic, European-wide information on VET in the port transport industry, the ETF determined to undertake a questionnaire survey of its affiliated unions in Spring 2008. Eighteen unions from fourteen EU Member States responded to the survey (a response rate of 52%).³⁵ The survey focused on the provision of training for new entrants, re-training and the acquisition of new skills, state regulation, the funding of training programmes, trade union involvement in VET, and an evaluation of the approach of different stakeholders to port worker training. In addition, a separate section considered health and safety at work, again with an emphasis on state regulation, trade union involvement, an evaluation of the effectiveness of health and safety procedures, and the approach of different stakeholders to the safety and well-being of the workforce.

From the outset, it is important to record that all port unions regard their members’ work as either “professional” or “skilled”, and it would appear that many national governments, public port authorities and global terminal operators (GTOs) shared a similar view, as illustrated in Figure 4. Private stevedoring companies were more likely to regard port work as “skilled” rather than “professional”.³⁶ But in what seems like a “throwback” to the days of casual labour, several unions indicated that dock work is still viewed as “general labour” by some

³¹ ESPO (2004) *Factual Report on the European Port Sector*, Brussels: European Sea Ports Organisation.

³² See PWG (1977) *Report of an Enquiry into the Current Situation in the Major Community Seaports*, Brussels: Port Working Group of the Commission of the European Communities; and ESPO (1996) *Report of an Enquiry into the Current Situation in the Major Community Sea-Ports: The Fact Finding Report*, Brussels: European Sea Ports Organisation.

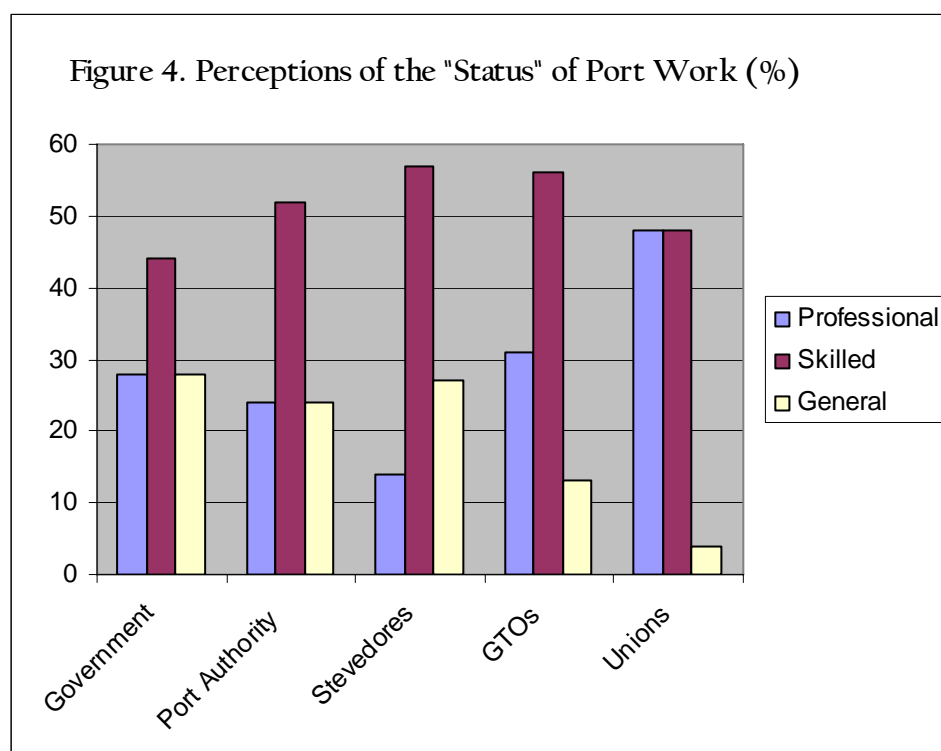
³³ Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

³⁴ The entry for Malta, for example, simply states that: “There is no formalised training, so new workers have to be trained on the job. It is only recently that training to present registered port workers was introduced”.

³⁵ The survey was completed by the national union official responsible for port workers. The countries included in the study were: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. Where appropriate, the reporting of data refers to countries rather than unions.

³⁶ Two-thirds of respondent unions claimed that private stevedores regard port work as “skilled” compared to only 17% who regard it as “professional”.

public port authorities, governments and private stevedores. GTOs, according to the respondent unions, were least likely to view port work as “general labour”.



In the majority of countries (57%), certified training is a condition of entry to the industry. Initial (minimum) training typically lasts for 3 weeks (15 days) although in some cases it is less than a week (e.g. Finland and Italy). Where there is controlled entry to the industry (e.g. via a scheme of registration for dock workers), as in the port of Antwerp, there is a much stronger emphasis on initial training. This is a clear example of how the system of employment and the organisation of port work can influence the provision of training. Under the Belgian port law of 1972, workers must be recognised as “dockers” before they can work in the “port area”. The three unions that represent dock workers, in conjunction with the employers’ association (CEPA), determine the number of new jobs in the port each year. As in many other European countries, port workers must be a minimum age³⁷ before they can register as a Belgian dock worker and there are other qualifying criteria such as good communication skills.³⁸ They then embark on an intensive 3-week training course (112.5

³⁷ Applicants must be 18 year old. Eleven of the fourteen countries included in the ETF survey have a minimum age requirement, typically 18 years.

³⁸ New recruits must “be of good behaviour and morality” (proven by a certificate delivered by the municipal authorities), pass a physical/medical examination, and possess the technical aptitude required for dock work. Dockworkers in Antwerp must have a sufficient professional knowledge of the language to understand all

hours in total) at a purpose built training centre, OCHA, financed and managed by the port employers' association.³⁹ Around a fifth of the new recruits' training time is theoretical (classroom-based) and the rest is practical work (cargo handling). The facilities at OCHA are illustrated below. New entrants must pass the training course before they can join other workers in the "hiring hall" to work as a docker. Although Belgium has not ratified ILO Dock Work Convention 137, the system of employment and training is consistent with Article 3 of the Convention, which states that "Registers shall be established and maintained for all occupational categories of dockworkers, in a manner to be determined by national law or practice", and Article 6, which states that "Each Member shall ensure that appropriate safety, health, welfare and vocational training provisions apply to dockworkers."⁴⁰

OCHA – Training Centre for Port Workers



orders and instructions relating to their work. The initial training covers ten commodities/processes, namely: stuffing/ stripping containers; pipes; steel plates and slabs; ro-ro (cars); special lifts; long iron bars/beams; forest products; coils, fruit; and container twist-locks. In many European countries, educational qualifications are a standard condition of entry for port workers.

³⁹ The training centre is a non-profit making institution that currently employs 38 trainers. Collectively, the employers contribute between €5-6 million per annum (according to the number of courses/trainees).

⁴⁰ Eight European countries have ratified ILO Convention 137 (Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). The Netherlands ratified the Convention in 1976 but then denounced the Convention in 2006.



Training Centre and Classroom Facilities



Major GTOs also provide extensive training for new recruits. Eurogate, for example, provides basic training on all internal regulations, rights and obligations of the workforce; familiarisation with the port area, the organisation, terminal equipment and operational practices; general safety training and health and safety related to specific areas/functions; management integrated systems (e.g. UNI EN ISO 9001:2000 and UNI EN ISO 14001); security regulations (ISPS Code); and operational communication systems (VHF, RDTS). Each new recruit receives 40 hours of theoretical training in the classroom and then practical training of varying duration, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Eurogate's Training Programme for New Recruits

Job Category	Theoretical Phase	Practical Phase
Checker – rail/gate	40 hours	36 hours
Checker – reefer	40 hours	80 hours
Rail Mounted Gantry (RMT)	40 hours	80 hours
Ship-to-Shore (STS) cranes	40 hours	80 hours
FLT	40 hours	80 hours
Rubber Tired Gantry (RTG)	40 hours	80 hours
Maintenance	40 hours	160 hours

It is not uncommon for port unions to share joint responsibility for the operation/management of training centres – half the respondents cited such involvement.⁴¹ In Sweden, for example, the Port & Stevedoring School (*Hamn & Stuveri Skolan*) has a management board with three representatives from the employers and an equivalent number from the trade union side. Even more unions (56%) share joint responsibility for the review of training provision, while rather fewer hold joint responsibility for the design of future training programmes (44%) or the instruction/provision of training (39%). A similar number of unions are either consulted or informed on these issues. An important aspect of involvement for trade unions is simply to be able to meet with new recruits during their initial training, not only to introduce the union but to highlight the pivotal role of the union in health and safety and other areas of port workers' training.

Re-training and upgrading skills to a different (higher) job classification is also catered for by port training schools. To become a straddle carrier driver in the port of Antwerp, for example, workers spend a week in school in the straddle carrier simulator, followed by a 2-week practical training course on the site of OCHA in a straddle carrier. Once assigned to a container terminal, straddle drivers must become acquainted with the terminal structure, planning procedures and electronic devices used for sending orders. They must then work for 150 hours on-the-job with a qualified mentor, during which time the trainee must pass three further driving tests. Gantry crane drivers in Antwerp must first undertake a 2-week intensive programme at OCHA on the simulator and then 4 weeks practical (on-the-job) training. Mobile crane drivers spend 2-4 weeks in school on the simulator and then 5 weeks

⁴¹ A further 28% were either "consulted" or "informed" on issues pertinent to the operation/management of training centres.

practical (on-the-job) training. Eurogate operates a similar, though less intensive, programme to upgrade workers skills, as illustrated in Table 3. Of the unions that responded to the ETF survey, the majority (72%) reported that provision for both upgrading and extending skills was “adequate”. The remainder, however, claimed that provision was “inadequate”, suggesting that there is a pressing need for more advanced training to facilitate the introduction, and make the best use possible, of new equipment and information technology.⁴²

Table 3. Eurogate’s “Polyvalence Training Timeframe”

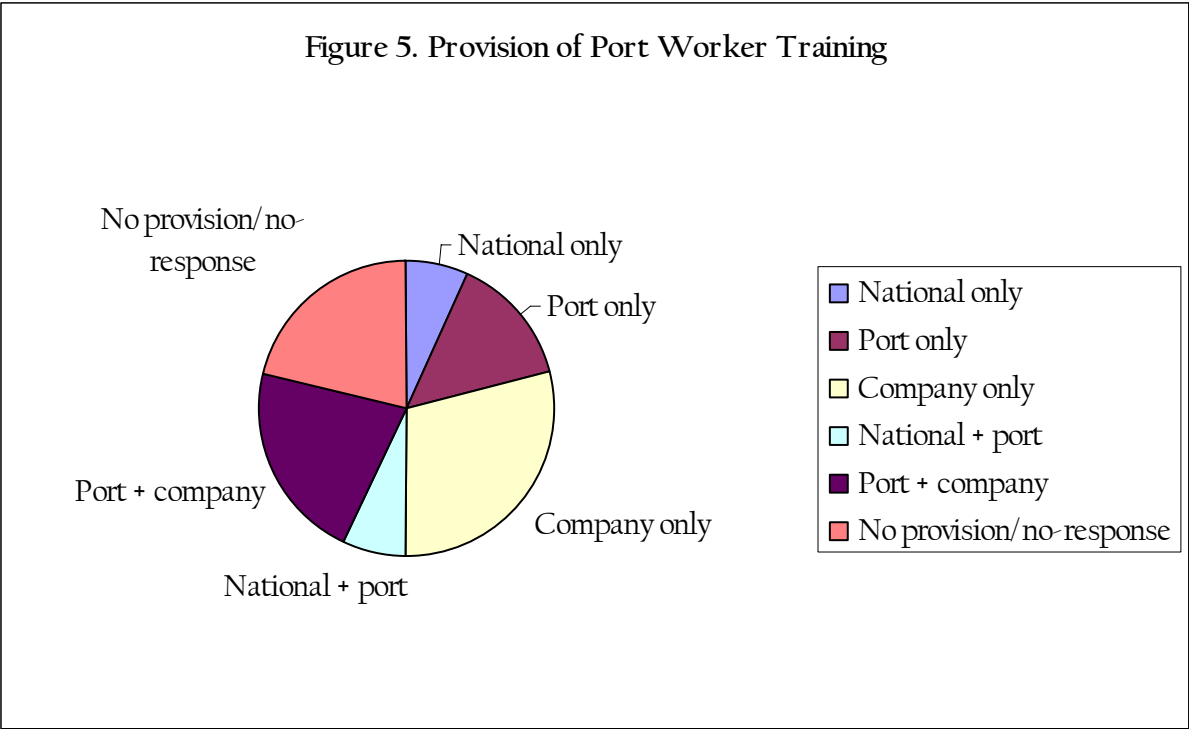
From ...	To ...	Theoretical Phase	Practical Phase
Checker	RMG, FLT, RTG	8 hours	80 hours
RMG, MHC, FLT, STS cranes, RTG	Checker – gate/rail	4 hours	36 hours
RMG, MHC, FLT, STS cranes, RTG, Checker – gate/rail	Checker - reefer	8 hours	120 hours
RMG, STS cranes, FLT	RTG	8 hours	60 hours
RMG, FLT	STS cranes	8 + 6 hours	80 hours
STS cranes, RTG, FLT	RMG	8 hours	60 hours
STS cranes, RTG, RMG	FLT	8 hours	60 hours

The port-based training system in Antwerp is one that is shared by many other countries, at least in terms of the formal organisation of port worker training (as opposed to the content or quality of training programmes, for which the Antwerp school is renowned). Six of the fourteen countries represented in the survey had some form of port-based training, either exclusively or in combination with national or company-based provision. In Bulgaria, for example, there are four training centres in Varna,⁴³ the nation’s major seaport, and one centre in Stara Zagora. Company-based training, either in combination with a port-wide (multi-employer) training programme or a dedicated (single company) basis, was even more prevalent. In the UK, company-based training is now the norm following the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1989 and the subsequent privatisation of many ports. The port of Felixstowe, for example, has its own dedicated training centre with a team of forty

⁴² This group included unions from Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. In Estonia, the union claimed that too much responsibility is placed on the workforce to upgrade their skills, rather than training opportunities being provided by employers, while the Greek affiliate highlighted the need for state regulation (i.e. legal compulsion) to ensure more advanced training opportunities. The FNV (Netherlands) is currently working on a plan for worker registration cards that would clearly display the docker’s competencies (especially in relation to health and safety). A similar system currently operates on the West Coast of the United States.

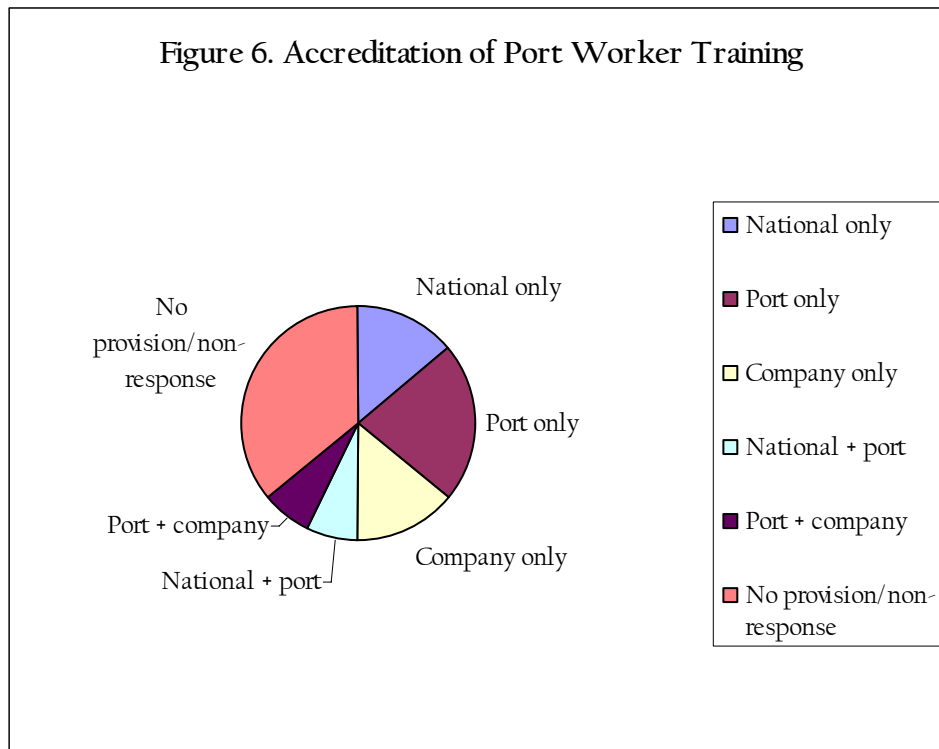
⁴³ The training centres in Varna cater for dock work, shipbuilding, the naval forces, and higher education (via the local technical university).

trainers and simulators for both rubber-tired gantry cranes and quay cranes. The different ways in which port worker training is organised in the fourteen EU Member States included in the survey is illustrated in Figure 5.



Similar variety is found with the accreditation of port workers' skills, as Figure 6 demonstrates. In Sweden, dockers acquire profession qualifications after 3,200 hours (2 years) in the industry, provided they have also undertaken the approved induction training. In Bulgaria, the training centres are licensed by the national agency for professional training and qualifications. Therefore, although training is port-based there is uniform training provision and a system of accreditation that is regulated on a national (tripartite) basis. Almost two-thirds of Member States included in the sample have some form of accreditation, despite the fact that in most countries included in the survey (57%) there is no statutory obligation to train port workers. Where training was mandated by law, this was more likely to be specified in port industry law as opposed to general employment law.

Figure 6. Accreditation of Port Worker Training



Where training is port-based, employers often share the costs of training provision. In Sweden, for example, the Port & Stevedoring School is financed by a 0.3% levy on the dockers' salary, which generates around SEK3.5 million per annum. In France, all employers must contribute 1.5% of their gross wage costs to VET each year – in the French ports, employers have contributed 2-3 times more than the legal requirement. In many European ports it is not uncommon for public port authorities or even the nation state to provide financial support.⁴⁴ In a couple of cases, European funding was also cited (e.g. European Structural Funds). Where training is company based, as under the pre-dominant landlord model of port organisation, it is inevitable that private employers will assume primary responsibility for funding. More than three-quarters of respondent unions cited private employers as a source of funding for port worker training.

GTOs and international shipping lines have much deeper pockets than smaller (local) stevedoring firms. In fact, small to medium-sized enterprises and sub-contracting firms are often criticised for their under-investment in training. This stands in stark contrast to companies such as Maersk, which runs its own dedicated training centre in Svendborg

⁴⁴ Over a third of respondent unions reported public funding of some description, either from the state or the relevant port authority. In Germany, for example, there is currently an €80 million programme to train young unemployed people to become dock workers. In effect, the state is paying for training rather than unemployment benefits.

(Denmark) as well as training centres in the UK, India and China. The latest training programmes offered by the Maersk Training Centre (MTC) are based on the CraneSIM simulator concept (launched in 2006) which aims to take rookie drivers from the quayside to crane cabin in 5 days.⁴⁵ Specially converted air-conditioned (40-foot) containers house a full-specification crane simulator and the units, like any containers, are transportable to wherever they are required. Tests have demonstrated that simulator-trained people are safer operators and data collected by MTC has shown that drivers trained on the CraneSIM programme reach levels of maximum efficiency quicker than those trained on traditional methods. The CraneSIM containers are hired out to terminals around the world for a minimum of 3 months⁴⁶ and MTC will even train the local trainers (which has the benefit of overcoming potential difficulties caused by language, custom or local procedures, as well as establishing a local network of mentors for future training initiatives). In addition to these “hard” (technical) skills, MTC offers course in “soft” (human) skills such as communications, conflict management, cultural awareness and leadership.

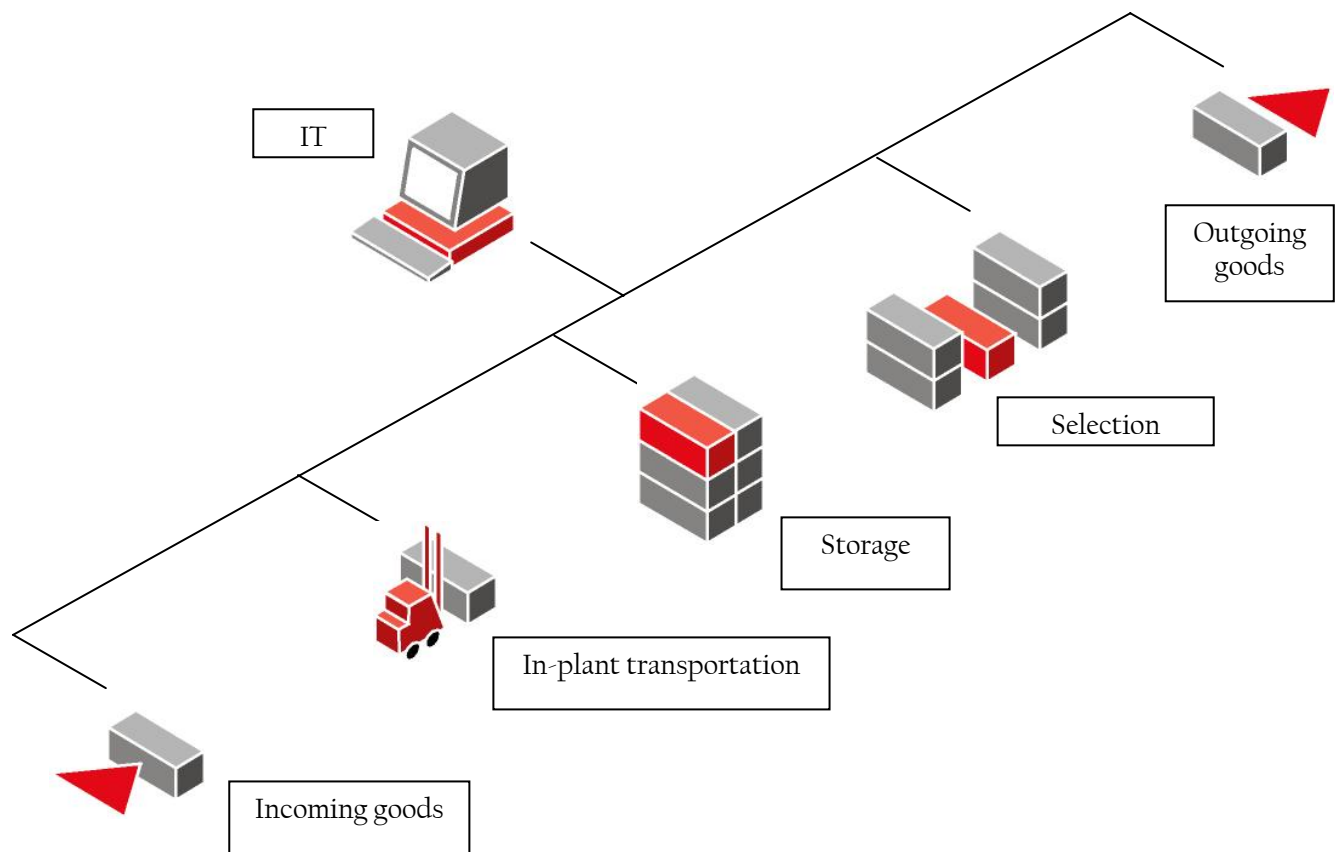
Where employers share the cost of training and/or where training provision is “underwritten” by the state (e.g. dockworkers in Antwerp are entitled to unemployment benefit borne by the National Labour Office during periods of training, as well as a supplement paid by the employers) then both the extent and quality of VET is generally enhanced. The ability to build port training programmes on the foundations of a strong national VET system is especially important. In Germany, for example, a port logistics apprenticeship programme has been developed by the ports of Bremerhaven, Hamburg and the new container port at Wilhelmshaven (due to commence operations in November 2011). There are approximately 370 different apprenticeship schemes in Germany, which around 60% of all German students follow after secondary school. The port logistics scheme is specifically targeted at long-term unemployed workers in the local port areas and also includes a commitment to employ at least 10% female workers. The modular training programme offered by ma-co (*maritimes kompetenzzentrum*) in Germany is a competency-based training system designed to offer greater flexibility for both employers and employees, which is consistent with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Each of the operational

⁴⁵ This is followed by a 10-day supervised programme in a real crane.

⁴⁶ Programmes are designed for four drivers a week to graduate from the simulator.

work procedures illustrated in Figure 7 is supported by a range of “basic” and “extension” modules.⁴⁷

Figure 7. Modular Training Programme Based on Operational Work Procedures

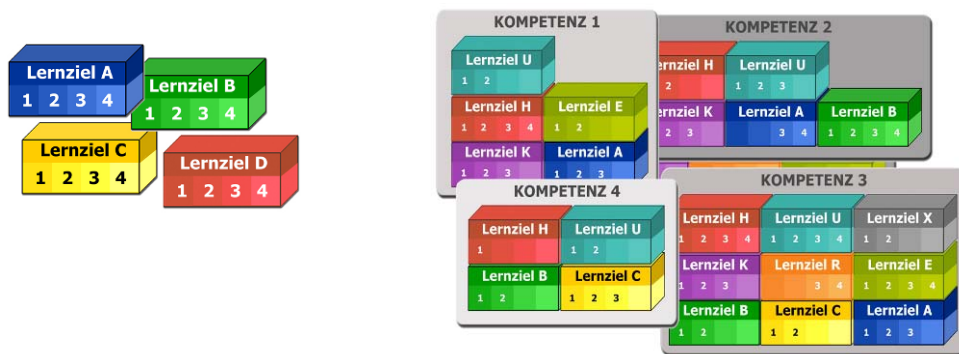


Under the modular training system depicted in Figure 7, single learning components are combined into competencies, which are then added into competency profiles and ultimately combined into recognised qualifications, as depicted in Figure 8.

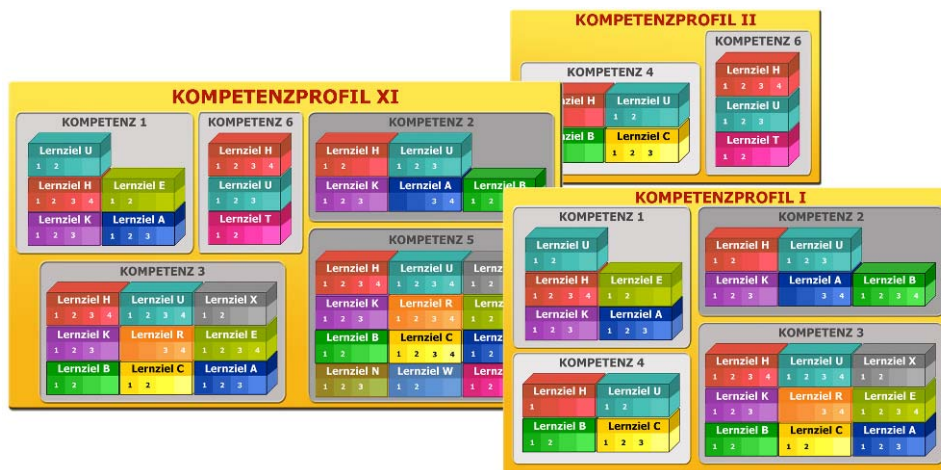
⁴⁷ The former include basic operational principles, technical systems, and the organisation and management of work. The extension modules include topics such as waste disposal and customs.

Figure 8. Competency-Based System of VET in German Ports

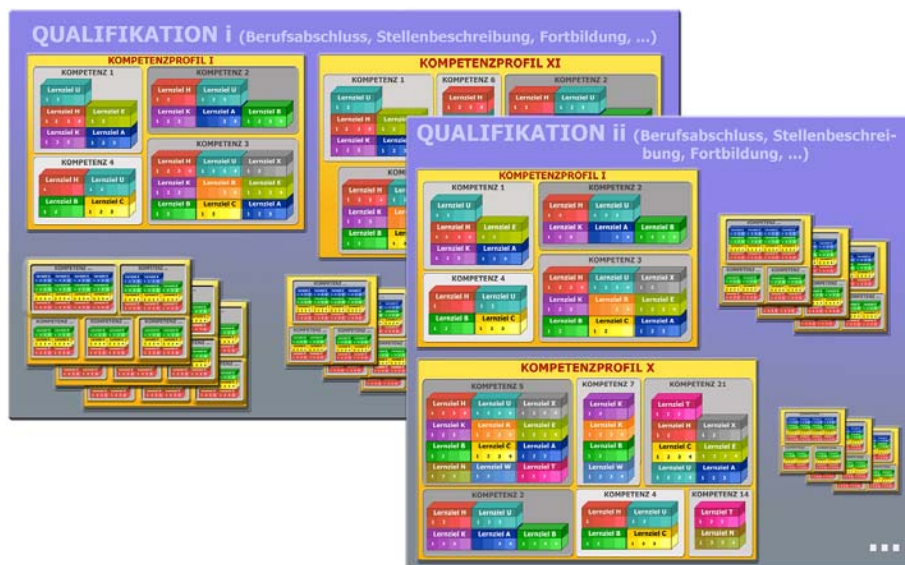
Single learning components ... are combined into competencies



... which are added into competency-profiles ...

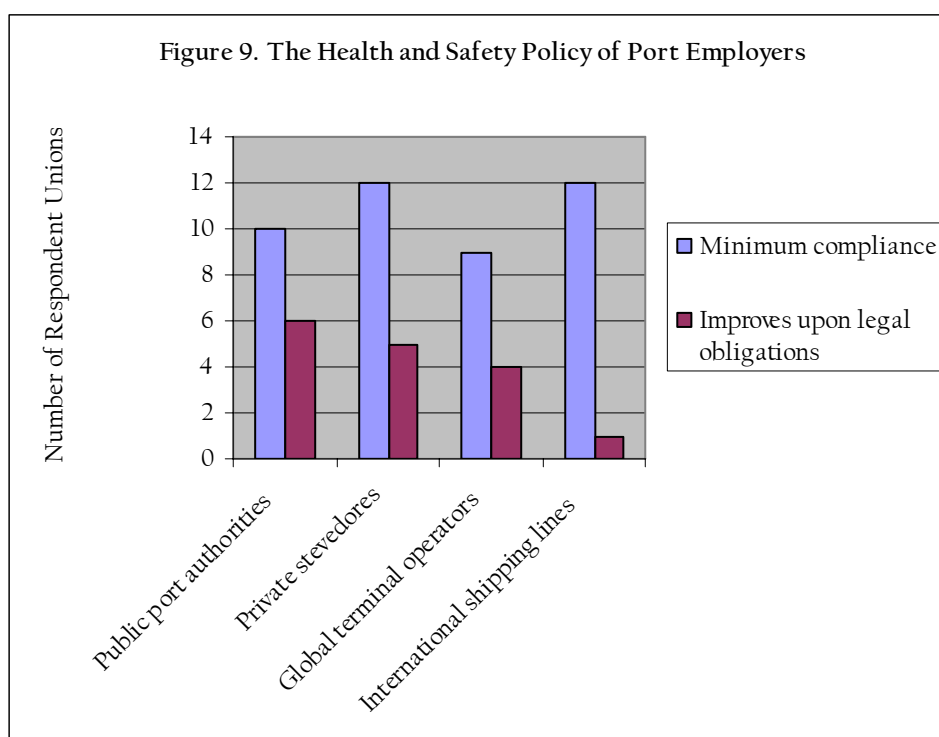


... which are combined into qualifications (i.e. certificates of proficiency)



Unfortunately, well-resourced training schools with highly professional training systems, as found in Belgium, Germany and Sweden and several other Member States, are not yet

universal. In fact, based on the survey of ETF affiliates there are relatively few examples of “best practice” in European ports. Only five unions were prepared to characterise the approach of any organisation responsible for port workers’ training as “best practice”.⁴⁸ In most cases, unions claimed that private companies (local stevedores and GTOs) provided no more than “standard provision” of training. While no unions were prepared to characterise the approach of GTOs to port worker training as “minimum provision”, both public port authorities (28%) and private stevedores (22%) stand accused of such an approach. A similar number of respondent unions (22%) characterised the approach of international shipping lines as no more than “minimum provision”. This “minimalist” approach would also appear to characterise the approach of *all* these different employers to health and safety: when asked whether health and safety policy improves upon relevant national laws or does no more than comply with minimum statutory provisions, the majority of port unions characterised the approach of each employer group as “minimum compliance”, as Figure 9 clearly demonstrates.



⁴⁸ Of the five unions, two cited private stevedores as examples of “best practice”, one cited GTOs, and the other two unions cited a combination of public port authorities, private stevedores and GTOs. Case based research conducted by the author indicates that more unions are willing to acknowledge “good” practice as opposed to “best” practice.

In the light of this evidence, it was not surprising to find that respondent unions painted a rather mixed picture of health and safety in Europe's ports. Overall, most unions considered health and safety to be acceptable: while only two unions claimed that their country's major ports offered "a safe and healthy work environment", six said that their major ports were "generally safe" with only "occasional risk of minor accidents and/or exposure to minor health hazards". A further six reported that their ports were "generally safe [with] occasional risk of serious accidents and/or exposure to major health hazards". The remaining four unions reported "persistent risk of accidents and exposure to serious health hazards". One might expect that these four unions would also report an increase in accidents at work, fatalities, short-term health problems and longer-term ailments, but this was not the case. In fact, there was no clear relationship between the unions' overall evaluation of health and safety in their major ports and whether they reported that accidents at work, fatalities, short-term health problems or longer-term ailments had increased over the previous 5 years.⁴⁹ Overall, 39% of the respondent unions reported an increase in accidents over the previous 5 years, a third reported an increase in fatalities, 28% noted a rise in short-term health problems, and 17% cited an increase in longer-term ailments.⁵⁰

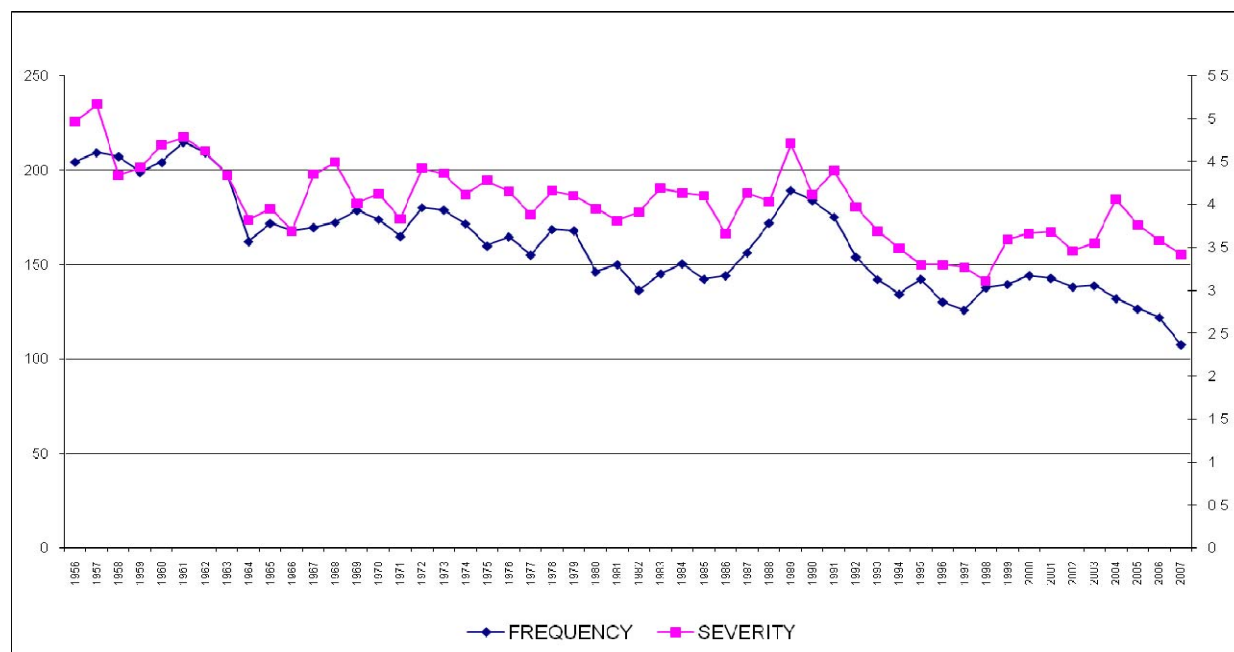
What is clear from other evidence is that systematic training programmes can significantly reduce accidents. The Maersk Training Centre in Denmark, for example, has maintained a logbook of all the "accidents" that trainees on the simulators have ever had. These data are used to simulate similar hazards for future trainees. In addition, local and freak weather conditions and tidal patterns are programmed into the simulator. This is one reason why simulator-trained drivers go on to be safer operators, especially when they actually encounter the unpredictable such as high winds. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the experience of Antwerp. OCHA first opened its doors in 1980 for induction training and has since expanded training provision to engine drivers (in 1984) and then tally clerks, signalmen and lashers, adding courses for warehouse workers in 1994, straddle carrier drivers in 2002 and gantry crane drivers in 2003. Since 1994 the training centre has also provided courses in the handling of dangerous goods and offered "back-to-school" training for long-standing dockworkers who need to be brought up to date with new cargoes, new cargo handling

⁴⁹ Two unions who described their major ports as posing a "persistent risk of accidents and exposure to serious health hazards" actually reported a decline in accidents and fatalities. Conversely, one union that described its country's major ports as "a safe and healthy work environment" reported an increase in accidents, short-term health problems and longer-term ailments.

⁵⁰ The proportions reporting a decline were 33%, 33%, 17% and 11% respectively.

methods and new regulations. Over this extended period, the Port of Antwerp has become a much safer place to work, as Figure 10 clearly illustrates.

Figure 10. Accidents in the Port of Antwerp (1956-2007)



A major concern for the European social partners (ETF and FEPORT), and the European Commission (DG TREN), is the lack of systematic and comparable statistics on accidents and injuries in EU ports. Over half the respondent unions collected data on work-related illnesses and accidents at work, so the figures previously cited on recent trends in accidents and ill-health are more than just the “impressions” of union officials. In addition, many unions reported that government agencies also collected such data.⁵¹ Most unions appear to trust their own data rather than that collected by government agencies or employers, at least in terms of how useful they find such data.⁵² The experience of UK ports should be highlighted at this point as there are no longer reliable data on accidents and injuries suffered by dock workers (following the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1989), with data now only available for all port workers (which includes ancillary grades, administration and the like). Even with a bigger denominator, accident rates have increased in recent years with the return of casual forms of employment. In addition, there are concerns that the numerator

⁵¹ Half the respondents noted that government agencies collected health and safety data specifically related to dock work (well over 80% said that government agencies collected such data for “all workers”). Far fewer employers, either public (28%) or private (39%), collect port-specific data.

⁵² Unions were more likely to describe government data as “moderately useful” or “not at all useful” than they were to describe it as “extremely useful”. The quality of health and safety data collected by employers, both public and private, was even less likely to be rated as “extremely useful”.

is in fact much larger than government statistics suggest, given that many (smaller/casual) employers do not systematically report accidents and injuries to the relevant authorities. During the Commission's Consultation Workshop in Valencia (see note 1), several unions raised concerns about the quality of port employment statistics, most notably health and safety data, and the Commission indicated that it would explore this issue further. The ETF Survey provides further evidence, if any were needed, of the importance of high quality data that can be used to reliably inform future EU ports policy.

The foundations of any safety management system should be a consistent and comprehensive data base which includes "incidents" as well as accidents at the work place. All but one of the respondent unions reported that either national legislation or company policy at major ports provides for systematic "risk assessment" of health and safety hazards, which suggests that processes and procedures are in place to collect such information. Nonetheless, several unions still maintained that all too often "companies simply do not declare incidents/accidents. And most of the time, reporting is used only for the sake of having records which are then left in the drawer ... Accident reporting should be made public; there is a need to put an end to the confidentiality of this first-hand information which too often remains in the hands of port operating companies. This would help to sketch out a typology of incidents/accidents. What should remain confidential are personal data (names, etc)" (correspondence from ETF affiliate).⁵³

Based on the survey returns, the principal reasons for trade union concerns about the general working environment in Europe's major ports appears to be: (i) the enforcement of health and safety regulations, and (ii) the training of new recruits to the industry. Legal regulation of health and safety is extensive, both in the form of general health and safety legislation that applies to port workers (cited by over three-quarters of respondent unions) and port-specific health and safety laws (cited by 56% of the sample). In Sweden, for example, section 3 of the relevant law states that:

The employer shall ensure that the employee acquires a sound knowledge of the conditions in which work is conducted and that he is informed of the hazards which the work may entail. The employer shall make sure that the employee has received the training necessary and that he knows what measures shall be taken for the avoidance of risks in the work. The employer shall see to it that only employees who have received adequate instructions gain access to

⁵³ These data could be used to establish a systematic safety auditing system, as found in other transport sectors such as civil aviation (e.g. air traffic control).

areas where there is a palpable risk of ill-health or accidents. The employer shall make allowance for the employee's special aptitudes for the work by modifying working conditions or taking other appropriate measures. In the planning and arrangement of work, due regard shall be paid to the fact that individual persons have differing aptitudes for the tasks involved.

Most unions (56%) regard general health and safety laws to be “fully comprehensive” in terms of the protection they offer to port workers from the full range of health and safety hazards at work.⁵⁴ In addition, nine European countries have ratified ILO Convention 152 (Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) 1979)⁵⁵ and the majority (61%) reported that preventative measures to guard against accidents and occupational diseases, as specified in the EU's Framework Directive (89/39/EEC) have been fully implemented.⁵⁶ Other measures provided for in the Framework Directive – on information, consultation and balanced participation, as well as the training of workers and their representatives – had also been fully implemented in a majority of cases (56% and 67% respectively). But while there might be a robust legal framework in place, how effectively is it implemented?

In response to a question about whether health and safety representatives have sufficient training to undertake their responsibilities, just over two-thirds of respondent unions made a positive assessment while just over a quarter believe training is insufficient.⁵⁷ On the question of resources, well over a third of respondent unions cited insufficient resources. One particular resource that appears to be in short supply is time, as the following comments from union officials bear witness:

⁵⁴ The remaining unions claimed that general health and safety legislation provided “moderate coverage”. Port-specific health and safety laws were less favourably evaluated – 39% reported these laws to be “fully comprehensive”, a third cited “moderate coverage”, and 11% reported that the law was “not at all comprehensive”.

⁵⁵ Convention 152 has been ratified by: Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. Seven of these countries are included in the ETF Survey (see note 26). The FNV claimed that since ratification by the Dutch government in 1998, “nothing happened after that” (survey comments). Other unions would no doubt share these sentiments as three claimed that the general provisions of Convention 152 have only been partially transposed while two reported that the Convention's technical measures had only been partially transposed.

⁵⁶ A further 22% of the sample reported that these measures had been “partially transposed”. Since the early 1990s, Community documents setting out the features of Community occupational health and safety policy have argued that poor implementation and enforcement of EC law on health and safety have become a core concern of Community policy in this field (it should also be noted in this context that Community policy on health and safety is broadly defined, going beyond the prevention of accidents and industrial disease to include all aspects of the worker's well-being).

⁵⁷ A prior question on the legal rights of health and safety representatives – “Does the relevant legislation confer sufficient rights and competences for health and safety representatives to adequately fulfil their role?” – elicited a very positive response from port unions (only one union disagreed in relation to general health and safety legislation and two disagreed when asked about port-specific health and safety laws).

“The most limited resource is time, because usually the health and safety representative is elected, trained and then left alone. If accidents happen he very often cannot participate in the investigation process” (survey comments)

“The labour protection delegate is entitled to do health and safety work during working time but the time is not sufficient to do it in a proper way” (survey comments)

“Our rank and file members who are part of the health and safety committees at the company level ... do not have sufficient time to study and implement all the legislation” (survey comments)

Most of these health and safety representatives are directly elected by the workforce, although in many cases they are nominated by management and/or the works council. Once elected or appointed, the health and safety representatives usually work with a joint union-management committee to ensure that health and safety training and other standards are met. Well over half the sample reported that health and safety laws are enforced by a joint union-management committee, and the work of these committees received a positive endorsement, unlike government agencies or employer sponsored committees that were charged with the enforcement of relevant health and safety legislation. Where government agencies exist, almost a third of respondent unions rated them as “not effective”.⁵⁸ Where employer-sponsored committees are responsible for the enforcement of health and safety, 43% of unions rated these committees as “not effective”. This is clearly one of the reasons why so few employers are judged to exemplify “best practice”, even though they should be fully aware of the health and safety hazards posed by their operations.⁵⁹

In addition to concerns about the enforcement of existing rules and regulations, unions also expressed concerns about the dangers facing new recruits to the industry, and with good reason. In Antwerp, for example, dockworkers with less than 1 year’s experience are involved in 50% of all industrial accidents. According to the respondents to the ETF survey, new recruits – defined as those with less than 2 years port experience – were most likely to be

⁵⁸ A further 56% judged the enforcement of health and safety legislation by government agencies to be “reasonably effective”.

⁵⁹ When asked whether national legislation or company policy at the major ports provides for “systematic risk assessment of health and safety hazards”, 94% of the sample said that national legislation made such provision and 72% affirmed that company policy provides for risk assessment.

judged as “ignorant of important [health and safety] risks”.⁶⁰ At best, new recruits appear to be “moderately aware” of the risks involved in the job.⁶¹ Shorter service workers – defined as those with 2-10 years port experience – fare not much better.⁶² Long-service workers with 10 or more years experience were far more likely to be judged “fully aware” of the risks involved in the job.⁶³ On the basis of these data, a strong case can be made for more thorough health and safety training in European ports, especially for new recruits. Ideally, this training should be consolidated by a system of mentoring for new recruits, drawing on the experience of long-service workers, combined with “refresher” courses on health and safety for all employees. These courses should review on-going health and safety issues as well as any new risks arising from the introduction of new technology or the handling of different goods in the port.

Conclusion

The provision of training for port workers varies systematically across European Member States. Its contours are shaped by the skills ecosystem, most notably the institutions for national VET, the organisation and management of port activities, and different systems of employment and industrial relations, including state legislation and the representation and involvement of trade unions. On paper, training provision and the protection of port workers’ health and safety appears comprehensive. But not all ports meet an acceptable standard and there are major question marks over the efficacy of port training and the enforcement of health and safety standards, especially in relation to new recruits to the industry.

While the social partners are committed to improving both training standards and health and safety in European ports, more systematic and ideally comparable data is needed for all twenty-seven Member States. This is clearly an area where the support of the European Commission would be welcome. The ETF survey also reinforces the earlier calls by organised labour for Community action with respect to health and safety legislation that focuses specifically on ports. Inconsistencies in terms of both standards of protection and the

⁶⁰ A fifth of respondent unions made this observation.

⁶¹ Two-thirds of the sample offered this assessment.

⁶² While only one union regarded these workers as “ignorant of important risks”, 61% rated them as only “moderately aware” of the risks involved in the job.

⁶³ The vast majority of unions (61%) offered this assessment (33% suggested they were “moderately aware”).

enforcement of health and safety regulations within different Member States highlight the potential benefit of Community action.

If progress is to be made on the idea of “mutual recognition” for qualifications in the European port transport industry (i.e. the Commission’s proposal for a “set of common requirements for training of port workers”)⁶⁴ then this must be based on the concept of “training quality standards” or “reference standards” and not “minimum standards”. Examples of best practice can inform this process, with trade unions, employers and other interested parties making use of a more coordinated approach based on their own representative organisations (e.g. ETF, FEPORT and ESPO) and existing networks (e.g. the International Port Training Conferences) as well as future initiatives such as the SSDC for ports. ESPO’s decision to join the SSDC is welcomed as training provision involves the public and not just the private sector in most European ports. To be sure, the private sector now assumes the lion’s share of training cost, especially for on-going training and life-long learning initiatives, but there are many aspects of training in general, and health and safety in particular, that still represent “public goods” (for the port, the workforce and the wider community) and not just a private benefit for the individual employer. Coordinated training programmes that are anchored in a broader VET structure, as found in Germany and several other Member States, provide a model for other ports in Europe and demonstrate the advantages of employers sharing the costs of training and development. This would benefit smaller and medium-sized port employers in particular. The failure of many of these smaller companies to invest in training and development suggests that a compulsory scheme may be necessary in some ports.

A particular focus for existing and future training programmes must be the quality and duration of training for new recruits. After many years of falling or stagnating employment levels, European ports have recently witnessed a sharp growth in traffic and the recruitment of younger workers, including many women in some ports. While the current economic crisis has dampened the heady growth of traffic of the past decade, and the associated expansion of port employment, the long-term future of the industry will hinge on its ability to attract and retain successive generations of highly qualified workers who enjoy (equal) opportunities for the acquisition of new skills, positive career development, and personal fulfilment. The future of Europe’s port transport industry can only be guaranteed by redressing the training needs

⁶⁴ *Communication on a European Ports Policy*, COM(2007)616 final.

of today, developing appropriate training programmes for tomorrow, and protecting the health and safety, work-life balance and well-being of current and future generations of port workers.

Appendix I

Given the impact of industrial restructuring, the introduction new technology, and the opening of markets, it is easy to understand why VET and life-long learning have featured so prominently on the agenda of Sector Social Dialogue Committees (SSDCs). In addition, VET and life-long learning can provide opportunities for young people and disadvantaged groups within the labour force. Examples of initiatives by SSDCs in this field include the following:

- *Agriculture* – in 2000, EFFAT and GEOPA-COPA adopted a White Paper on vocational training. In 2002, the social partners signed a European agreement on training in agriculture containing proposals on the involvement of the social partners in the organisation of vocational training and the validation of skills.
- *Banking* – a joint declaration of 2003 concentrates on the key themes of defining different skills, validating competencies, providing information and support on principles, rights and responsibilities and the mobilisation of resources for retraining.
- *Chemicals* – in 2005, ECEG and EMCEF adopted a joint declaration that underlined the lack of skills facing the chemical industry and stated the mutual interest of employers and employees investing in the necessary skills.
- *Cleaning* – in 1995, guidelines on vocational training were adopted that underlined the commitment to increase professionalism by creating the necessary conditions for developing vocational training. In 2000, a guide containing tools for setting up training programmes was issued and a European training manual on health and safety was published. In 2001, a training kit of basic office cleaning techniques was released.
- *Electricity* – in a declaration adopted in 2000 on the social implications of the internal electricity market, the social partners highlighted the importance of training, re-training and re-deployment of workers following restructuring. A joint declaration on future skills needs was adopted in 2004, which encouraged the development of training plans, increasing the number of apprenticeships and plans for monitoring and evaluating actions.
- *Inland waterways* – the social partners are developing an inventory of professional qualifications in the EU with a view to establishing their equivalence and thereby enhancing mobility. The final objective could be the definition of EU-wide professional qualification requirements.
- *Postal services* – guidelines on promoting employment in the postal sector in Europe, issued in 1998, included a commitment to training by the social partners on issues related to working methods, the use of equipment, hygiene and safety. In 2000, the SSDC organised a round table on training and skills development in order to exchange best practices concerning employment, new technologies, adaptation to change, and training methods.
- *Road transport* – in 2005, the SSDC adopted joint recommendations on employment and training in logistics aimed at uplifting workers' skills and competencies, improving the quality of the logistics services and facilitating the mobility of workers.
- *Sea fisheries* – in 2000, with the support of the European Commission, the social partners developed the European Network for Fisheries Training and Employment (REFOPE) which connects training institutes in the sector in order to promote employment and access the profession to young people. REFOPE brings together a list of fisheries' training courses in the various Member States, provides a directory of training institutes, facilitates the exchange of teaching materials and supports the training of teachers.
- *Shipbuilding* – the social partners are working on the themes of "skills and qualifications shortages" and "image of the sector" to attract highly qualified workers to their sector. They have created a dedicated working group on qualifications and training in order to exchange good practice, to promote the recognition of qualifications throughout the EU and to support the development of skills.

Source: European Commission (2006) *Recent Developments in the European Sectoral Social Dialogue*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Appendix II

Germany – Legally defined social partner involvement is an inherent part of the development of VET policy. The Vocational Training Promotion Law (*Berufsbildungsförderungsgesetz* 1981) regulates the responsibilities of the bodies involved in determining VET policy at the national level as well as monitoring and evaluating VET. The Vocational Training Law (*Berufsbildungsgesetz* BBiG 1969) defines the responsibilities of the sixteen regional state committees for VET (*Ländersausschuesse für Berufsbildung*) and the Chambers (*Berufsbildungsausschuesse der zuständigen Stellen*). The Social Law III (*Sozialgesetzbuch III*, 1997) defines shared responsibility for employment and labour market programmes, including training, continuing training and re-training. The main board of the national level Federal Institute for Vocational Training (*Bundesinstituts für Berufsbildung*, BIBB), its Standing Committee (*Ständiger Ausschuss*) and the Joint Committee of the Federal States (*Ländersausschuesse*) comprise representatives of central government, employers and trade unions, plus representatives of the Federal States (*Länder*). At the company level, the social partners are typically involved in selecting and allocating training subjects. Works Councils can request the employer undertakes a “training needs analysis” and there is consultation and participation with respect to training activities and the selection of trainers.

France – The involvement of the social partners in VET policy making is defined in various articles of the Labour Code, notably Book IX, Article 910-1 which states that: “Vocational training and social advancement form the basis of a concerted policy coordinated chiefly with employers’ and employees’ organisations.” The social partners meet the authorities at national level to discuss VET issues in the National Council for Vocational Training, Social Advancement and Employment (CNFPPSE) which examines government priorities in education and vocational training. Trade unions are not formally consulted before laws are drafted, but virtually all legislation pertaining to initial and continuing vocational training is approved in inter-occupational agreements prior to adoption. At sectoral level, the social partners can dictate funding volume and prioritise certain types of training (e.g. for apprenticeships or preference to low skilled workers).

The Netherlands – The Dutch system (often referred to as the “poldermodel”) is a hybrid between the state regulated social dialogue of the “Rijnlands model” and the free market voluntarism that characterises the “Anglo-Saxon model”. The poldermodel is characterised by an intensive and elaborate system of negotiation and consultation, which has allowed the social partners to increase the scope of their negotiations on employability and training (most notably as a result of the “Wassenaar treaty” of 1982). The Vocational and Adult Education Act (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*) defines the various methods of formal communication and involvement of relevant actors with the social partners formally represented on the boards of the national vocational education bodies. The Social Economic Council (*Sociaal Economische Raad*, SER) is the main advisory body of the Dutch government on national and international social and economic policy. In its advisory capacity, SER represents the interests of trade unions and industry. Being independent of government and financed by industry, SER may give advice (solicited or unsolicited) on all major social and economic affairs.

Ireland – Despite its voluntarist tradition, the social partners play a significant role in VET policy. The Labour Services Act 1987 defines social partner involvement in developing national VET policy. Vocational training policy is established at national level by two tripartite bodies: the Training and Employment Authority and the State Training Agency.

Source: Winterton, J. (2006) “Social Dialogue and Vocational Training in Europe: Are We Witnessing the Emergence of a European Model?” *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 30(1): 65-76.