



# Public policies support lifelong learning among company employees

POLICY BRIEF  
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## IMPRESSUM

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# PUBLIC POLICIES TO SUPPORT LIFELONG LEARNING AMONG COMPANY EMPLOYEES

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Pia Cort is Associate Professor at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. Her research area is vocational education and training, lifelong learning and lifelong guidance policies and the policy-practice nexus. She has contributed to the development of the methodology of 'policy trailing' applied within the LLLight-in-Europe project work package 5: 'Trailing the Unpredictable Pathways of EU Lifelong Learning Policy' in Milana & Holford (eds.) (2014) *Adult education policy and the European Union: theoretical and methodological issues*, Sense Publishers.

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## Introduction

How can policy really support lifelong learning in companies?

In today's knowledge-based economies, the importance of lifelong learning is well-known. International organisations such as the OECD and the European Union have stressed its importance for over 20 years. The EU sees lifelong learning as essential to the success of European enterprises, and to the international economic competitiveness of Europe as a whole.

*What needs to be done to develop public policies, which really support lifelong learning in companies?*

The LLLight'in'Europe project has investigated how public policies can most effectively support lifelong learning for the workers in European companies. This policy brief provides evidence drawn from our research. Using the "policy trail" method we have been able to see how companies interact with public policy.

Our analysis focused on how existing public policies support lifelong learning across various EU countries. These encompassed a range of forms of governmental intervention in the regulation or shaping of lifelong learning in the private sector. Our key concerns in this policy brief are with the relations between the EU and national and regional governments. Our method allows us to investigate not only policies which are explicitly about « lifelong learning », but also other policy areas such as labour, research and development (R&D) policy, social care, and educational policy.

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## Key Observations

Lifelong learning interacts with many areas of economic and policy activity

Lifelong learning takes place across a wide range of private and public activities.

In policy terms, lifelong learning is a “transversal” matter: that is, it plays an important support function across a wide range of policy areas.

For similar reasons, lifelong learning is particularly susceptible to the “law of unintended consequences” – it can be strengthened or damaged almost accidentally by policies targeted on other issues. Several policy areas affect lifelong learning in companies, and sometimes their effects are not explicit or direct.

Innovation-oriented working environments seem to encourage some types of lifelong learning. In such environments, there seems less need for public support to encourage work-related lifelong learning – it happens spontaneously.

Companies’ awareness of public support for lifelong learning is often limited

Companies are often uncertain about the effectiveness of the current public policy measures to encourage lifelong learning in the workplace.

Publicly subsidized work-related training provision is widely perceived as not generally meeting employees’ specific lifelong learning needs. This is especially true in knowledge-intensive and innovation-oriented working environments.

Effective utilization of public policy provisions and funds in the areas of education and vocational training, as well as innovation and R&D, entails experience in generating relevant lifelong learning opportunities for employees.

Continuing education at work is funded almost exclusively by employers and the private sector. In some countries, particularly post-transition economies, many public adult learning initiatives have limited impact on SMEs because of excessive administrative requirements. Inspired by the EU, public bodies focus on regulation, but companies tend to see public provision as neither efficient nor well-targeted.

### Social partners' role can strengthen lifelong learning

Inspired by the EU, public bodies focus on regulation, but companies see public provision as neither efficient nor well targeted.

Collective agreements between social partners are a powerful mechanism in enforcing workers' right to continual participation in lifelong learning. They can press companies to invest in their human resources and shape the management of professional development.

Regulation of professions (e.g., architects, health and social care professionals) creates lifelong learning needs and has a significant positive impact in ensuring companies implement training and staff development plans.

### Training trainers enhances quality

Public investment in training of trainers provides support for quality and for the appropriate adjustment of learning and training methodologies to suit different learner groups.

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## Recommendations for Policy-Makers

### Lifelong learning matters for many areas of policy

Lifelong learning matters for the success of policies across many areas – not only in education and training. When planning, policy-makers should be aware that encouraging lifelong learning among key groups may make the difference between success and failure.

In allocating public funding for vocationally-related lifelong learning, policy-makers should take note the likelihood that companies and employees in some sectors, particularly technologically-advanced sectors, may invest in training without public subsidy. They should consider how far it is cost-effective to support through public funds what individuals or enterprises would fund in any case.

### Good regulation encourages lifelong learning

Policy-makers should recognise and support the key role of regulatory frameworks, in particular those developed by professional bodies, in encouraging work-related learning.

Tailor-made provision of formal courses may be more effective in meeting lifelong learning needs than more uniform provision.

Public investment in training of trainers should remain a priority.

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## Research Parameters

### LLLight'in'Europe research project

The policy trail method involves combining analysis of national legislation and policy initiatives with the results of case study research in and around enterprises. Fourteen case studies were conducted, involving interviews with samples of managers, workers and policy actors, and analysis of company documents. The enterprises were located in Denmark (1), Germany (7), Italy (1), Slovakia (1) and Spain (4).

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## Project Identity

LLLight'in'Europe is an FP7 research project supported by the European Union, which has investigated the relevance and impact of lifelong learning and 21st century skills on innovation, productivity and employability. Against the background of increasingly complex tasks and jobs, understanding which skills impact individuals and organizations, and how such skills can be supported, has important policy implications. LLLight'in'Europe pioneered the use of an instrument to test complex problem solving skills of adults in their work environment. This allowed for the first time insights into the development of professional and learning paths of employed individuals and entrepreneurs and the role that problem solving skills play. Additionally, LLLight'in'Europe draws on a series of databases on adult competences from across the world to conduct rich analyses of skills and their impact.

These analyses were conducted in concert with different disciplines. Economists have been analyzing the impact of cognitive skills on wages and growth; sociologists have been investigating how public policies can support the development of such skills and lifelong learning; innovation researchers have been tracking the relationships between problem solving skills, lifelong learning and entrepreneurship at the organizational level; educational scientists have investigated how successful enterprises support their workforce's competences; cognitive psychologists have researched on the development and implications of cognitive skills relevant for modern occupations and tasks; and an analysis from the perspective of business ethics has clarified the role and scope of employers' responsibility in fostering skills acquisition in their workforce. The team has carried out its research and analyses on the value of skills and lifelong learning in EU countries, USA, China, Latin America and Africa.

The result is a multi-disciplinary analysis of the process of adult learning and problem solving in its different nuances, and of the levers which can support the development of these skills for both those who are already in jobs, and for those who are (re)entering the labor market, as well as the development of effective HR strategies and public policy schemes to support them.

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This policy brief is part of the publication suite of the FP7 Project LLLight'in'Europe. The publication suite consists of 21 policy briefs, 6 thematic reports and 1 synthesis report. The 21 policy briefs discuss findings and policy implications proceeding from the project's research; they are organized along three level of analyses (persons; enterprise; country) and seven topics.

01	<b>Resources of society for learning</b>
02	Institutions of learning
03	Circumstances of learning
04	Role of transversal skills
05	Role of job-specific skills
06	Productivity of skills
07	Outcomes of skills

This policy brief discusses findings related to **Resources of society for learning** at the analysis level **country**. For further publications and multimedia material related to the project, please visit [www.lllightineurope.com](http://www.lllightineurope.com)