

CLR-GB

Newsletter 3/2005

The CLR-GB Office is a platform linking CLR activities at EU and GB levels as well as trade union and academic work in GB in the field of Construction Labour Research. It will support related initiatives specific to GB.

Introductory Note

The most significant activities of CLR-GB are certainly the ESRC-CLR Seminars on 'People in Construction'. Given the sensitivity of the subject, the controversial debate of the Seminar on 'Social Protection and Health' 12th May 2005 should not have surprised anyone. We would have liked to publish complaints we have received on the phone, but obviously there was not enough motivation to put anything in writing for this Newsletter.

In the meantime another seminar on 'Skills and Training in Construction in the European Union' 6th October 2005 attracted a great international audience. In the first session different concepts and systems of training across Europe were discussed. The contrast could not have been sharper between the training of site managers in Britain and in Germany. Nor between the regulated industry-wide Belgian system and the British reliance on on-the-job training. In the second session three examples from Denmark, France and Great Britain showed the disparity of innovative approaches to training. And the final session was to discuss the European dimension. The only contribution to this subject was from Anneke Westerhuis/NL whilst Jonathan Green/UCATT presented the British

'Construction Skills Certification Scheme' CSCS, which is rather a very insular approach to skills and training.

We have decided to publish Anneke Westerhuis' paper, hoping that it will be more provoking in print than it was at the seminar. Overall, my impression was that the subject of skills is difficult to discuss across European borders and in particular across the Channel. Though skill shortages are now a most urgent issue of political debate and government initiative in Britain, there was little sign in the seminar that more than patching up shortages is on the agenda. The British 'Project Based Approach' and 'Skills Academies' seem to be designed to provide unskilled labour with abilities to carry out specific jobs, ad hoc as needs arise. A thorough rethink of a long-term strategy to provide skills on the basis of a solid initial training in well defined segments of the labour process seems to be completely absent, or perhaps to be regarded as outdated in a country which is governed by a belief in the dynamic of business competition.

The series of ESRC/CLR seminars will be concluded 17 March 2005 in Brussels with an attempt to flesh out priorities for the development of labour in construction in Europe.

The annual general meeting of CLR-GB will take place on 5th December 2005 at 5 p.m. at the University of Westminster, London NW 1, 35 Marylebone Road— see details below. We will plan activities for next year and are looking forward to your ideas.

Jörn Janssen, November 2005

The new European Qualifications Framework: its significance for the construction industry

1 Why an EQF?

The EQF's roots lie in the Lisbon Strategy, which aims to develop a knowledge-based society capable of combining economic competitiveness and dynamism with sustainable growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. To achieve the education and training side of the Lisbon goals, in March 2002 the Barcelona European Council established the Education and Training 2010 work programme. For the first time, European Education Ministers agreed a set of common objectives for education & training.

When comparing the activities in EU countries, it was obvious that the development of qualifications frameworks has reached different stages in the countries currently participating in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. It was felt that the communication or read-across between these systems becomes more complex and that this is likely to hinder transnational co-operation and development, and so labour mobility. This problem is further accentuated by the tendency to develop qualifications and competences at sector level.

A European qualifications framework is required to facilitate communication between diverse frameworks and systems. The European framework can be seen as a conversion table allowing citizens, employers, and education institutions to navigate between different countries' qualifications, covering learning outcomes of different settings for learning: school, university, the workplace or in civic or personal life (formal, non formal, informal).

2 The EU aims for the EQF

EQF is an instrument:

- A means of understanding VET systems across the European Community
- A means of reducing barriers to movement of people, skills and enterprises; to facilitate mobility within the European labour market
- A means of linking VET to HE
- A means of coordinating – cross border – sector activity
- Facilitating cooperation between providers of VET in Europe
- The basis for equating qualifications and training provisions across countries (QCA)

Its position is to:

- Help citizens to navigate within and between complex national systems of education and training and therefore support their lifelong learning;

- Allow policy-makers and educational institutions to compare systems and qualifications and thus strengthen transparency between different education and training systems;

In a more pro-active, dynamic sense, EQF

- Is supposed to facilitate mobility within the European labour market
- Will support efforts to develop qualifications at sector level;
- Facilitate recognition of third-country qualifications
- Will stimulate and guide reform and the development of new national frameworks.

3 EQF in details

EQF, now in a consultation phase, is

- A 'meta' framework, facilitating comparisons between NQF's and their building blocks
- Based on learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, personal and professional competences
- Comprised of eight levels

4 Will EQF be a success?

Two logics from economic textbooks:

- 1) the demand will create the supply
 - 2) the supply will create a demand
-
- 1) Was there a popular, wide felt demand for an EQF from enterprises, social partners, citizens and policymakers, which inspired its creation?
 - 2) If not, will EQF trigger
 - i) the demand for more transparency of EU member VET systems,
 - ii) the mobility of people, skills and enterprises,
 - iii) better links between VET and HE and
 - iiii) cooperation between providers of VET in Europe?
 - 3) More specific: Will EQF trigger
 - i) the demand for more transparency of qualifications in construction?
 - ii) the mobility of people, skills and enterprises in construction,
 - iii) better links between VET and HE in construction and
 - iiii) cooperation between providers of VET in construction in Europe?

Whether or not EQF will be a success will largely depend on its reception in economic sectors, for instance the construction sector. Not because the instrument is well designed and fit to serve its purposes, but because the aims it serves are congruent with the sector's policy.

5 The state of the art in construction

What is the sector's policy and how important are the qualifications of migrant workers in this policy?

First, some general facts:

- 1) Mobility in the EU is low and declining (5% of those resident in Europe are not resident national of the country in which they live, with approximately two-thirds of that figure coming from outside the EU; Geddes, Balch, 2002)
- 2) Annual mobility of EU nationals is less than 0,4% of the resident population
- 3) VET has a contribution to make towards a European Labour market, but is not the major driver for creating greater migration of people (Leney et al, 2004)
- 4) Past experience suggests that language skills confine many migrants to low-skilled jobs
- 5) However....., is the impact of the enlargement of the EU fully appreciated in these statements?

The Construction sector has a long tradition in work migration:

- 1) Migration is of a 'people to work' nature
- 2) Migration is triggered by a production process, which requires great numbers of workers at a temporarily basis ('large –scale requirement for low skilled labour'), flexibility of labour input
- 3) Labour productivity varies greatly across Europe, indicating differences in construction methods, standards, work organisation, site management, standardisation, prefabrication, tools, technology
- 4) Labour costs in construction vary greatly across Europe Some EU countries report serious labour shortages (ageing workforce, difficulties in attracting recruits) affecting the price of labour, having a direct effect on construction costs (NL, FI)

(Editor's comment: labour productivity and costs in the UK as shown in the figures below reflect the amount of unreported labour.)

Labour productivity in construction (value added per person employed) in thousand EUR, 2002

CZ	DK	DE	EE	ES	FR	IE	LV	LT	LU	HU	NL	PL	PT	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK
6.6	43.6	35	8	16.8	36.7	76.6	10	5.8	45.9	7.9	48.7	9.5	16.2	13	8	44.6	43.3	55.9

(Source: EUROSTAT 26/2005)

Labour costs in construction (costs per hour) in thousand EUR, 2002

CZ	DK	DE	EE	ES	FR	IE	LV	LU	HU	NL	PL	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK
3,9	27,1	26,3	11,6	14,22	24,42	17,31	2,24	24,6	3,83	22,99	4,48	8,98	3,06	22,13	28,56	22,85

(Source: EUROSTAT)

- 5) Officially, there are 12.7 million employees in the sector (7.9% of the EU total workforce). The true number is likely to be substantially higher as it is estimated that a significant proportion of the labour force in construction is undeclared in the industry. According to the European Commission. 7%–19% of all work in the EU is undeclared and the problem is believed to be particularly acute in construction.

[i] Eurostat, *Labour Force Survey 2002*

[ii] *European Commission, Communication on Undeclared Work, COM (98) 219, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998b.*

[iii] *Mateman, S. & Rencoy, P.H., Undeclared Labour in Europe – Towards an integrated approach of combating undeclared labour, Amsterdam, 2001.*

Reports from Finland estimate that 10% of the workforce in construction will be from other EU countries in 2010.

It is obvious that labour migration is cost driven. Construction has a tradition of a interregional mobile labour force. Migration is generated by differences in supply and labour costs across Europe and intensified by the lower thresholds for workers from the low

wage countries and labour shortages in some EU countries.

Differences in work organisation, site management, standardisation, prefabrication, technology, tools and materials do not seem a big obstacle to employ workers, suggesting that the costs of labour are more important than the exact qualifications. (Besides, how will these differences be expressed in the eight levels EQF?)

This leaves one question; as long as the cost factor is the main driver for migration, one's qualifications come absolutely second. Adapting work organisation on site and the costs of on the job training will be easily earned back, covering up the differences in qualifications and qualification levels, for that matter: Is a sector policy feasible in overcoming this fact of life?

Anneke Westerhuis/CINOP

Reports:

Labour Migration and Employment Rights

House of Commons, 18th October 2005

Very welcome was the Institute of Employment Rights' Parliamentary public briefing meeting on

'Labour 'Migration and Employment Rights' held in the Grand Committee Room 18th of October.

Opening the meeting John Cruddas MP showed the relationship between neo-liberal migration policies and the growth of the Far-right vote in Dagenham and Barking 'where many see the role of migrant labour as a central determinant of their own relative economic impoverishment'. He saw ending the weakness on all workers' employment rights as a key factor in reversing these developments. Nick Lowles, from the anti-fascist magazine 'Searchlight' pointed out that the BNP's newspaper devoted most of its pages to attacks on the trade unions, who were 'betraying British workers'.

There was a wide range of contributors including Neil Gerrard MP, T&G, law firms, The Joint Council for the Welfare of the Migrants, and The Working Lives Institute; around 70 people attended. Attention was focused on explaining the lack of rights of migrant workers, the working of the system, and government's role in this.

Evrard Quale, a black worker and representative of the contracted out Parliament cleaners, struck the right note when he recounted the long-running dispute, including strike action, these minimum wage workers were engaged in with a Parliamentary Committee to get such basics as holiday pay and sick pay.

The meeting was also the launch of *Labour Migration and Employment Rights*, edited by Bernard Ryan, London: Institute of Employment Rights, 2005.

George Fuller

Future events:

CLR-GB, Annual General Meeting

5th December 2005, 5 p.m.
University of Westminster
35 Marylebone Road, London NW.

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Report of CLR-GB activities, critical debate
3. The final ESRC/CLR seminar, a political event
4. Publication based on the ESRC/CLR seminars
5. New CLR research projects
5. Activities, projects in 2006
7. Good bye with drink and chats
7. The future of construction labour in Europe

ESRC/CLR Seminar:

The future of construction labour in Europe
March 17th 2006, Brussels,

This final seminar in the People in Construction series is intended to assess the future position of

building labour in Europe today. It will draw on the previous seminars

- on historical change,
- women in construction,
- the nature of the employment contract,
- participation, social protection and health and safety,
- skills and training,

to present an account of the issues confronting labour. At the same time, the intention is to go beyond these specific issues and present an evaluation of the position of building labour in Europe today, in particular in Britain, and an assessment of the strength and weaknesses of policies intended to address its further development. It will be divided into three sessions:

- *Issues confronting building labour:* including differences between east and west Europe, social dumping, discrimination, working time and conditions.
- *The overall position of building labour:*
- *Policies:* including a debate between representatives of European social partner organisations for the construction sector.

For further information contact Linda Clarke.

To Our Readers:

The CLR-GB Newsletter is the organ of exchange for CLR in Great Britain. This function depends on the cooperation of its readers. The editors ask everybody who is interested in construction labour to contribute with information and commentaries. Please send your suggestions, articles, information, letters, etc. to

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