Study investigates how lifelong learning is essential to continued employability

An EU study has been launched to research the importance of lifelong learning and its impact in the workplace. Research to date has generated little evidence on how human capital is created through lifelong learning activities by individuals, companies and public bodies across Europe. To change this, 25 researchers have been assigned to the LLLight’in’Europe project. This project will have funding allocation of EUR 2.65 million from the European Commission’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for Research and Technological Development (RTD).

The need for research into lifelong learning can be seen when looking at the gap between those with higher education and those without. According to employment statistics, 82.8 % of Europeans between the ages of 24 and 65 years who had a tertiary education degree in 2010 were working. In the same age group, the statistic was 68.3 % for those who had completed secondary schooling. The figure drops to 46 % employment for those who did not complete secondary schooling. This demonstrates that if Europe wants to be working, higher education is a necessary foundation for being competitive in the labour market.

However, it is believed the cumulative investment necessary to generate higher education degrees for adults over the next two decades across Europe may be as much as EUR 3.5 trillion, or 1.4 % of the European gross domestic product (GDP) per year. Even higher investments will be required for non-formal and informal environments for lifelong learning, to take place across an employee's working life. Taking this into account, lifelong learning is seen as an essential factor in continued employability, from not only an individual perspective, but also for the economy.

The project also aims to benefit businesses, as lifelong learning is perhaps more relevant now than it has ever been. Businesses today are increasingly dependent on an educated and creative workforce to achieve success, particularly in a fierce national and global environment. Young, skilled workers are increasingly hard to find because of demographic change, but supplying high-quality lifelong learning opportunities could ensure the optimal productivity of an ageing workforce.

As competition for talent intensifies and employee mobility continues to increase, lifelong learning can play a role in strengthening a company's ability to attract and retain talented employees.

In order to tap into the skill set of employees, the project will use the new method of Complex Problem Solving Skills (CPS), which uses computer-based testing for assessment, and measures an employee's strengths in solving complex problems quickly and in a collaborative manner. The results of the study will then allow businesses to tap into the potential of lifelong learning and achieve goals such as: attracting new talent and
keeping them, fostering innovation and acquiring knowledge to enter new markets. This will then influence policymakers, business strategists and individuals on incorporating lifelong learning into the workplace.

To help achieve their goals, the University of Luxembourg will collaborate with nine universities and research institutes from four disciplines. Dr Samuel Greiff, a psychologist and researcher at the University believes that the CPS methodology is far better as it can reflect changes that occur with informal learning that happens in the workplace. He says, 'Computer-based testing allows another level of assessment that is not possible with paper-pencil methods. It adds a dimension of testing as the individuals are sitting in front of their computers and being simulated with real-life experiences.'

LLLLight’in’Europe, which began in January 2012, will assess CPS capabilities in 4 150 individuals over four years - 3 850 employees from 50 successful companies in 15 EU countries and four non-EU countries. An additional 300 will be entreprenuers from across Europe. The project will run until September 2016 with first results expected to be published in 2015. For more information, please visit: LLLight’in’Europe: http://www.lllightineurope.comUniversity of Luxembourg: http://wwwen.uni.lu/