

## Glossary of Terms Employability Subgroup – May 2010

### Competence

The ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development). This extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills and includes: 1) cognitive competence; 2) functional competence; 3) personal competence; and 4) ethical competence.

**Comment:** competence is not limited to cognitive elements (involving the use of theory, concepts or tacit knowledge); it also encompasses functional aspects (involving technical skills) as well as interpersonal attributes (e.g. social or organisational skills) and ethical values.  
**Source:** Cedefop, 2004, European Commission, 2006a. Incl in 2008 update

### This term has been included in the top-level glossary also.

The subgroup discussed the various interpretations of the term 'competence' within different member states, with specific relevance to employability. For example in the UK it often refers more exclusively to skills and vocational education/training linked to employment, whereas the term 'knowledge' has more formal educational connotations. In NL competence describes all the skills of a person, is always related to LLL and always contextualised. It also changes as a person changes jobs, and is, therefore, seen as a personal ability, always linked to tasks.

### Employability

The combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during their career.

**Comment:** employability of individuals depends on (a) personal attributes (including adequacy of knowledge and skills); (b) how these personal attributes are presented in the labour market; (c) the environmental and social contexts (i.e. incentives and opportunities offered to update and validate their knowledge and skills); and (d) the economic context.

**Sources:** based on Scottish executive, 2007; The institute for employment studies, 2007. Incl in cedefop 2008 update

The subgroup discussed the term in detail and agreed with the following as an extended interpretation of and comment on this term:

- “the ability to gain initial employment; hence the interest in ensuring that ‘key skills’, careers advice and an understanding about the world of work are embedded in the education system
- the ability to maintain employment and make ‘transitions’ between jobs and roles within the same organisation to meet new job requirements, and
- the ability to obtain new employment if required, i.e. to be independent in the labour market by being willing and able to manage their own employment transitions between and within organisations.”  
Hillage J, Pollard E, Research Report RR85, Department for Education and Employment, November 1998

The subgroup considered also the following comments as further developing the discussion:

“What does employability actually mean — what is it that helps make an individual employable? Our definition suggests that we can separate out four main elements: the first three are analogous to the concepts of production, marketing and sales, and the fourth the market place in which they operate.

**Assets:** These comprise an individual’s knowledge, skills and attitudes. We distinguish between:

- knowledge and skills, be they in terms of basic skills (e.g. numeracy, literacy etc.) or subject and occupation-specific knowledge at different levels (e.g. from booking keeping skills through to senior accountancy roles), and
- personal attributes and attitudes, ranging from basic levels of reliability, common sense, attitude to work and integrity; through to those such as problem solving, initiative, self management and commercial awareness.

Previous definitions of employability have tended to stop here. However, these are not enough; people also need the capability to exploit their assets, to market them and sell them. Thus they also need:

**Marketing and deployment skills:** These inter-related skills include career management, job search skills, and approach (i.e. being adaptable to labour market developments, realistic about labour market opportunities, and willing to be occupationally and locationally mobile).

**Presentation:** Another key aspect is being able to get a particular job, and centres around the ability to demonstrate assets. This includes: the presentation of CVs etc.; the qualifications individuals possess; interview technique; and work experience/track record.

**The personal and labour market context:** Finally, and crucially, the ability to realise or actualise employability assets depends on external factors, the individual’s personal circumstances and the inter-relationship between the two.”

Tamkin P, Hillage J -Report 361, Institute for Employment Studies, November 1999

The subgroup considered how these definitions contribute to the discussion of the relationship between voluntary or paid work (what is traditionally called employment) and how ULLL can contribute to supporting the learner engaged in voluntary work.

We noted that there are different social phenomena / different motivations influencing this issue. We also noted (*ref CEV General Assembly Paris, France, March 2007, Final report – ‘Volunteering as a route (back) to employment’*) that volunteering must remain a free choice and must not be seen as a social measure to help the unemployed or to be a requirement for an individual to obtain state unemployment benefit. We discussed whether volunteering planned by an individual as a route back to employment is in fact true ‘volunteering’.

We concluded that ULLL can help a volunteer ‘value the opportunity’ where there is an overlap with a route to employability but this should not always be its primary aim or role. Volunteering is a ‘learning event’ and should be valued for this in itself. ULLL is not a tool of the state to reinforce the ‘need to get qualifications’ but can help a learner/volunteer, who may not have previously engaged in much formal learning, take first steps to access these learning opportunities.

Thus ULLL can help to build the bridge between social and economic activity. But it needs to be presented to volunteers as an opportunity not a necessity/requirement. ULLL should not be viewed as ‘professionalizing’ the role of the volunteer.

Learning triangle            the playing field for lifelong learning strategies. Its constituent parts are the individual, the organisation and the school with their own respective learning responsibilities: self-management of competencies, competence management and competence-steered curricula. The balance of power is flexible and is dependent on goal and context of learning. (Duvekot 2006)

The subgroup considered that this term reflects the need to involve the volunteering organisation or employer supporting their staff volunteering. It was also noted that the balance of power is flexible.

Refs to cedefop refer to its 2008 publication [\*\*Terminology of European education and training policy: A selection of 100 key terms\*\*](#)