

Opinion on Training, Safety and Protection of the Environment

(91/C 159/15)

On 29 May 1990 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the fourth paragraph of Article 20 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an Opinion on Training, Safety and Protection of the Environment.

The Section for Social, Family, Educational and Cultural Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 11 April 1991. The Rapporteur was Mr Nierhaus.

At its 286th plenary session (meeting of 24 April 1991), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

1. Importance of vocational qualifications for improving safety at work and the quality of the environment

1.1. All human activity has an impact on nature which places a strain on the environment. In view of the pollution caused by, *inter alia*, the industrial division of labour, a more discriminating use of natural resources is becoming increasingly important. Environmental protection must become the watchword both for management, which must exercise firmer control over the industrial use and processing of materials, and workers, who must carry out their tasks in the same spirit. All those working in production and administration need to have a thorough knowledge of environmental causes and effects if industrial society is to develop in an environmentally acceptable manner. Although management bears a special responsibility in this, the involvement of workers is essential. If they are better educated in this respect, workers will be able to put their ideas and knowledge regarding the environment to practical use; this should happen right from the training stage.

1.2. There will be an all-round improvement in industrial safety and the environmental acceptability of products if staff are qualified in this way. A comprehensive knowledge of the environment contributes to environmental innovation in products and production processes. Manufacturing, using and handling products in an environmentally responsible manner is the bounden duty of employers, workers and consumers. They cannot manage this, however, without proper education and training. By the same token, safety in the manufacture, distribution and use of products is the responsibility of employers, workers and consumers, who require the appropriate education and training. Hence instruction in environmental and safety matters is a strategically important element in environment- and safety-conscious management, whatever the size of the firm.

1.3. Individuals should be encouraged to assume more personal responsibility for the natural environ-

ment by action to increase their environmental knowledge and skills. In its Opinion on the proposed Council Decision on preventing environmental damage by the implementation of education and training measures [COM(88) 202 final of 10 May 1988—CES 952/88 of 29 September 1988] the Committee stressed that the inculcation of interdisciplinary knowledge and skills can lead to greater commitment. Environmental education should therefore be aimed at various target groups and should broaden and deepen knowledge of the environment through the use of appropriate teaching aids and methods.

1.4. The aforementioned proposal for a Council Decision calls on the Member States to promote the training of specialists in the various disciplines relating to the environment by introducing ecological subjects into training programmes. The aim is to encourage greater awareness of the need to conserve natural resources and protect the environment. In its Opinion on the proposal the Committee urged the Commission to set up pilot projects in the Member States in cooperation with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. The measures proposed by the Commission for the training of environmental specialists is just one of the questions looked at in the present Opinion.

1.5. No one now disputes the need for a comprehensive environmental education. In addition to regulatory measures and economic incentives, selective action must be taken to safeguard the natural environment and future generations by encouraging environmental awareness. This means alerting people to the importance of environmental protection both in school and at the workplace, in handling both manufactured and natural products. This is best done by making environmental studies an integral part of vocational training, including in agriculture.

1.6. A work-related environmental education makes it possible to bring theoretical knowledge and skills

systematically to bear on environmental causes and effects. This integrated approach can also pinpoint the areas of conflict between, on the one hand, intervention in nature and its effects on the environment and, on the other, technical requirements and economic interests. Such a constructive approach to the tensions between ecology and economy, to the interaction between nature and work, can speed up the introduction of preventive environmental measures based on a thorough knowledge of the environment. Many people will learn to recognize earlier the warning signs of threats to the environment. To this extent environmentally aware and skilled workers are an important *sine qua non* for improving the quality of the environment at and outside the workplace.

2. The environment as a new component of training for all occupations

2.1. The subject of environmental protection, unlike that of safety, has hitherto played hardly any role in training in the EC Member States. Such knowledge must become an integral part of the qualifications for all occupations if environmental awareness is to be strengthened and more people are to acquire environmental skills. The Member States should take steps to include environmental objectives in all stages of training. An interdisciplinary approach is needed under which environmental problems are looked at in their totality and from a practical angle. Suitable teaching aids are required for this.

The use of vocational skills in the interests of environmental protection should be an examination requirement, so that the new subject is taken seriously by both teachers and pupils.

Exams should test the ability of workers to carry out their tasks without environmentally harmful consequences.

2.2. If environmental skills are successfully introduced into vocational training, workers will be environmentally-aware and able to use their knowledge and experience to help industry make a more effective contribution to environmental protection and to avoid mistakes in production which damage the environment. For industry this opens up the possibility of avoiding or reducing the costs which it would incur for eliminating pollution under the polluter-pays principle. The inclusion of general, work-related environmental studies in vocational training will therefore also help to avoid unnecessary costs and conserve natural resources.

A precise cost-benefit analysis can show whether and to what extent the extra training costs incurred are

offset by reduced environmental costs. To this extent an early environmental education will also help to secure corporate objectives (markets, profits, jobs, etc.) and improve the company's public image.

3. Specialists in environmental protection

3.1. If the complex ecological problems facing a firm or comparable organization are to be tackled more successfully, what is needed—besides an environmental component in the vocational training of all staff—is opportunities for further on-the-job training. Workers who already have some training could do additional courses so as to qualify as specialists in environmental protection and act in this capacity for part of their working time. The selection and training of these specialists, in collaboration with workers' representatives, would be a priority for management. They would be responsible, along with the technical environmental specialists (eg. those supplying and disposing of materials), for providing detailed environmental information for individual departments and occupations. They should contribute to their firm's compliance with environmental laws and requirements and, in the interests of preventive environmental protection, develop proposals with other employees for making production processes and products more environmentally acceptable; these proposals should be compatible with the firm's production goals.

These environmental specialists, working in one department of a firm but taking a multi-disciplinary approach to environmental problems, could possibly in this way contribute to the prevention of environmental damage without thereby lessening the responsibility of individuals or the ultimate responsibility of the firm's management.

3.2. For practical purposes especially, safety at work and protection of the environment are closely connected. Like the industrial safety officers already found in many firms in Member States, the environmental specialist could help to monitor the environmental performance of equipment and workers, motivate the latter, and form a link with line management as well as with the industrial safety officer and the industrial environmental officer of the firm concerned where such posts exist. Because protection of the environment and of safety have a number of common features, it is both sensible and necessary for industrial safety and environmental experts to cooperate closely. Small and medium-sized businesses, whose production volume

and size of the workforce would not justify the employment of separate environmental health and industrial safety officers, could cover themselves by providing additional training (in environmental protection or industrial safety). In this way one employee could be responsible for both areas.

3.3. If these proposals are implemented, management should also have the opportunity to use environmental knowledge in quality circles to develop environment-friendly products and production processes. This will facilitate the introduction by management of Quality Assurance applied to environmental protection.

This does not exclude the possibility of a firm seeking outside environmental advice.

3.4. Environmental work should be handled separately, i.e. by an internal department separate from the safety and health committees.

The quality circles referred to in 3.3 would undoubtedly be an appropriate place. While safety is directly relevant to all of a firm's workers, the environment affects not only the firm and its workers but also the outside world, e.g. sub-contractors, suppliers, customers and, of course, the final consumer.

3.5. If the above proposals are implemented, attention will have to be paid to the danger of a distortion of competition affecting small and medium-sized businesses (SMB). Consideration should also be given to economic and social cohesion, especially in cross-border situations.

Done at Brussels, 24 April 1991.

*The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee*

François STAEDLIN

Opinion on the Commission Proposals on the prices for agricultural products and on related measures (1991/1992)

(91/C 159/16)

On 14 March 1991 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposals.

The Section for Agriculture and Fisheries, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 11 April 1991. The Rapporteur was Mr Schnieders.

At its 286th plenary session (meeting of 25 April 1991), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by a large majority with 2 votes against and 8 abstentions.

1. Preliminary comments

1.1. The Committee notes the difficult situation on the agricultural markets caused by the continuing increase in production, stationary or declining consumption, reduced export opportunities, rising imports of cereal substitutes and of calves for fattening.

1.2. This difficult situation is reflected in falling producer prices and falling or stagnant farm incomes, growing surpluses held in stock, rising expenditure on export refunds and intervention.

1.3. As a result the budget guidelines laid down by