



## Editorial

2012 is over and the New Year has arrived. Like previous years, 2012 was not an easy one for the TCL sectors in Europe, certainly if we only consider employment in our sectors which as continued to fall with some companies restructuring or relocating production.

This reality, prevailing for some years now, would suggest there are no job vacancies in our sectors or that our companies do not need a new, skilled workforce. The opposite is true.

During the final conference of the first year of the TCL Skills Council held near Brussels on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2012 (see further in this newsletter for a report), one of the reports clearly points towards a continuous demand in many countries for new, skilled workers in our sector, and that the future of the TCL sectors in Europe partly also will depend on the success in finding these very workers.

In France, the employment outlook in the TCL sectors shows that more and more companies consider an expansion of their workforce in the TCL sectors in the coming years. A majority of the companies in the TCL sectors in France expects status quo regarding employment. In short, this represents the most positive outlook in France since 2008. In Belgium, the prospects and growth in demand-driven companies in the textile sector (production on demand, customized production with a higher added value) continues to increase, and this already since years. In the European leather industry, employment in some important countries (Spain, Italy) is stable, or is even on the increase (Germany, United Kingdom).

The need for new workers in our sectors is obvious, not least because of the challenge of an ageing workforce.

Education and training are therefore key to the future of the TCL sectors in Europe. The basis therefore is having enough schools and universities offering specialized study programmes for secondary and higher education students. This basis then needs to be reinforced by offering unemployed workers opportunities to enter vocational and educational training programmes which will subsequently endow them with the necessary knowledge and skills to gain access to companies and our sector.

Building on from this is the need for ongoing training programmes in companies for all workers because skills, competences and needs are evolving together with the progress made in innovation, technology, design, techniques and machinery equipment. Continuous training and Life-Long Learning (LLL) are of utmost importance in keeping workers on board and enabling them to adapt to new competence requirements and technologies.

The above are challenges for which public authorities, companies and social partners bear responsibility.

Furthermore, our sector suffers from a problem of image in Europe. Young workers want to get involved in a sector offering a prospect of a long career, with new investments, cutting-edge technologies and good working conditions. Also here, our sector has to compete with other sectors for the same skilled workers and youngsters.

Working on the image of our textiles, clothing, leather and footwear sectors to highlight the opportunities for, and possibilities of an attractive and challenging job with a future will also be a task for the European and national Social partners to take up.

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## Luc Triangle

industriAll European Trade Union, Deputy General Secretary and Board member of the EU TCL SSC



# Conference 2012

## A successful final conference of the first year of the TCL Skills Council !

■ The final conference of the first year of the TCL Skills Council was held on 12 December 2012 in the Elewijt Center just outside Brussels. More than 60 participants active in the sector took part in the event; the social partners, the press, research institutes and the European Commission.

It concluded an intensive, but fruitful year for the relevant stakeholders. The EU TCL Skills Council was established as a core European body for dealing with qualification needs and vocational and educational training (VET) for the different Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear sectors.

The three initial reports, drafted by the national Industry Skills Partnerships (ISPs), member of the TCL Skills Council, were presented. The contributing ISPs to these reports were COBOT (B), IVOC/IREC (B), OPCALIA (F), Creative Skillset (UK) and Osservatorio Nazionale Concia (IT).

During the final conference these reports were presented to the audience. The fourth report comprised the concluding recommendations based on the three reports and input from the three initial founding organisations of the TCL Skills Council (COTANCE, Euratex and industriAll European Trade Union). As many as 82 specific proposals were reduced to a small

number of key recommendations to the European Commission and other stakeholders in the relevant sectors.

The final report has been published and will be disseminated. We want it to be viewed and used as an instrument for policy making to better address the issue of qualification and training needs in the TCL sector in our different European countries.

The overall objective is to foster policies, actions and initiatives etc. to promote training, growth and innovation in the TCL sectors. There are many vacant jobs in the sector which create a strong need for

qualified employees. Additionally, the continually evolving technology gives rise to the need for new qualifications and skills in the sector. These needs must be met to further develop the sector in Europe and shore up its future.

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The ISPs are the link between the European Skills Council and the national industries. In 2013, priority will be given to expanding the council to include more countries than just Belgium, UK, France and Italy. The ISPs can also network bilaterally or work transnationally.

In 2013, activities will equally be launched to integrate more deeply the members of the TCL Skills Council network, or the so-called associated members. Research institutes, interested organisations dealing with the



same challenges and other stakeholders will be more closely involved in the activities. Presently, we have almost 400 contacts and organisations in this network database.

Unanimous agreement in the conference was reached that workers need to be continuously trained and educated. They need to be prepared for changes in the labour market. Their employability, internally for the company and externally for the labour market, should always be the driving force behind these initiatives.

Lifelong learning as a means to solve competence mismatches was one of the main messages from the conference. It is a catalyst for improving the image and

attractiveness of the sector and securing its future in Europe.

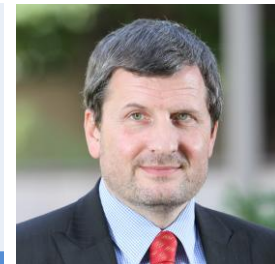
All stakeholders in the conference thought that it a wise decision to set up the skills council. Given the fact that the sector faces an ageing workforce in the companies, we risk losing skills, knowhow and expertise at company level; the sector must consequently improve its appeal to young workers.



We have only just embarked on this long journey. Our work is in progress. In 2012, the Skills Council delivered what was expected of it and what was demanded from the European Commission.

## An interview with...

**Xavier Royer**  
Head of department OPCALIA TMC



### Q: Could you briefly introduce Opcalia?

■ Opcalia is an OPCA (a joint body for collection of fundings for trainings). There are twenty of them in France. It is a joint body (managed by representatives from businesses and employees under the guardianship of the state) that undertakes to collect and handle the mandatory participation of companies for vocational training. Opcalia spreads out the companies' investment: which allows financing a part or all of the training plans that are put into place by the companies, but also qualitative projects on employment, training and HR issues.



### Q: Is Opcalia exclusively dedicated to Textile, Fashion and Leather firms?

■ No, Opcalia is a multi professional and multi branch organisation that manages training funds of all types of companies. Nevertheless, Opcalia is divided in several dedicated departments and has a specific one for the Textile, Fashion, Leather companies. This particular department also includes "L'Observatoire des métiers de la Mode, des Textiles et du Cuir". It's through this department that Opcalia participated to the first European Skills Council.

## Q: What are your expectations for the European Skills Council?

■ The European Skills Council is a platform where stakeholders try to analyse the trends of the sector in terms of skills needs, but also to share best practices. Their objective is to assist the development of an efficient political employment/training at a national and European level. As such; it has a similar purpose to the French observatories and other structures in different countries. It was therefore important for us to participate in this council: on one hand to share our knowledge in the steering of the observatory and on the other to benefit of the experience of the other countries. Given the issues that faces the sector, it was vital to adopt a vision that was more European than French.

## Q: What are your thoughts concerning the work carried out by the European Skills Council after this first year?

■ This first year consisted on working on 4 reports that were presented in Brussels (Elewijt) on the 12th of December. This work allowed to exchange information, and to identify best practices, and to give a glimpse on common projects in different countries. But of course, it is only the beginning. We are convinced that the cooperation between the different observatories can improve their

effectiveness and have a real positive impact, especially to contribute to the training of systems, and the long term attractiveness of the sector.

## Q: What are Opcalia TMC's concrete actions in terms of support and training practices?

■ On the behalf of the social partners of different branches (Footwear, Fashion design, leather, Steam Pressing, Clothing, Textile) Opcalia TMC's aim is to help firms from the sector to anticipate economic, social and demographic changes concerning employment and qualification, by fostering access to vocational training to employees, more specifically the most vulnerable: special funding, professional qualifications, innovative and specific devices (HR diagnostics, Official training session with branch label, Job studies, capitalisation operations and know how transfer...).

### A few facts

*In 2011 Opcalia TMC trained 31 000 employees, 1900 work experience contracts were created, 700 official training session with branch label were delivered and 400 HR diagnostics were established.*

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