Managing change

How trade unions in Europe are helping the employability of professionals and managerial staff

A report for UNI-Europa

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Note:

This report has been prepared as part of an initiative by UNI-Europa's Professional and Managerial Staff (P&MS) committee to explore ways of maintaining the employability and adaptability of professional workers in the new economy.

UNI-Europe defines professional and managerial staff as follows:
An employee:
a) who has completed a higher level of education and vocational training or possesses recognised equivalent experience in a scientific, technical or administrative field; and
b) who performs, as a salaried employee, functions of a predominantly intellectual character involving the exercise of a high degree of judgement and initiative and implying a relatively high level of responsibility.
The term should also cover any person who, in addition to possessing characteristics (a) and (b) above, has had delegated to him/her by and under the general direction of his/her employer responsibility for planning, managing, controlling and co-ordinating the activities of part of an undertaking or of an organisation, with the corresponding authority over other persons.

This report, first produced in 2002, has now been substantially revised, drawing in part on the results of a questionnaire sent by UNI-Europa to its affiliates in the spring of 2004. Seventeen replies were received from unions in ten European countries.

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Introduction: managing the process of change

The world of work is changing rapidly. The assumptions which individuals and societies could hold about the nature of jobs and employment just a generation ago no longer seem to work today.

An increasingly globalised economy is seeing the rapid growth in international trade, in services as well as in goods. Major companies are increasingly operating multinationally rather than in single countries. Neo-liberalist economic philosophy has led to an international agenda which stresses economic liberalisation and privatisation. All this has led to major upheavals in important sectors of the economy.

The way work is undertaken is also changing. Jobs are no longer necessarily for life. Careers do not always develop in a reassuringly linear progression upwards. Old hierarchical work structures, dating back to the 'scientific management' approaches of the early twentieth century, are being challenged and in some cases dismantled. Companies are adopting new management styles.

Employment relationships are changing, too. New forms of contractual relationship are developing, outside the traditional employer/employee contract on which so much employment legislation and social insurance protection, particularly in Europe, is based. This includes, for example, agency working and corporate outsourcing to nominally independent freelance contractors. Even where the legal employer/employee relationship remains unchanged, the *implicit* contract between company and worker – by which an individual could expect to be offered security and reward in exchange for his or her corporate loyalty – has certainly changed. Increasingly individuals are told to take responsibility for their own working lives and careers, including the responsibility for ensuring that they constantly update their skills.

Furthermore, the development of information and communication technologies has changed profoundly the way businesses can operate. Work is no longer necessarily subject to clear spatial and temporal limits: the development of mobile working and teleworking demonstrates that work can take place away from the traditional office or workplace whilst the borders between work time and home time are increasingly becoming blurred.

Professionals, managers and senior staff are particularly affected by these developments. Indeed, in some respects the pressures are greatest for these workers, who are expected to

take the lead in steering their organisations through times of rapid management and technological change whilst at the same time taking on new responsibilities towards nurturing their own careers.

Managerial staff are certainly not immune from suffering the downside of change. The process of restructuring, de-layering and downsizing which many companies adopted in the 1990s, for example, had the effect of removing swathes of middle management posts. Many older workers found themselves pushed prematurely into early retirement.

For those remaining in post, work-related stress has become a significant issue in the workplace.

Nevertheless, if increasingly the production of goods and services is to rely less on the exploitation of physical capital and more on the use which is made of human capital, then there are obvious opportunities in the information and knowledge society for highly-educated professional workers. We are increasingly aware that it is to human knowledge and skill which we must look in order to drive forward economic growth.

Professionals and managers, in other words, should find themselves in many ways better placed than others in the workforce to reap the benefits of the knowledge society. But we must add an important caveat: this is conditional on them being given the opportunity to adapt in time to the changes.

The skills necessary in order to work effectively need constant renewal, through a process of lifelong learning. The emphasis is shifting from a focus on knowledge acquisition to competence development. Problem solving skills, social skills, team working, adaptability, creative thinking and flexibility of response are likely in future to be more valuable than factual knowledge or the ability to undertake repetitive skills.

This report examines good practice by trade unions in Europe in helping and supporting their members who are professionals and managers through this time of change. As will be seen, many unions are actively engaged in valuable pioneering work in a number of areas. These extend the traditional support offered through the processes of social dialogue and collective bargaining into a range of other, innovative, services, in many cases specifically tailored to the needs of professionals and managers. Some examples are:

- support in undertaking needs analysis and in career development
- direct help in finding new and better employment
- direct help in training and lifelong learning

- support for workers working as freelances or independent contractors
- support for staff working abroad
- innovative uses of new technology in communicating with professional and managerial staff

This report begins, however, by placing these developments in context, by looking briefly at recent European-wide initiatives in employment and employability, in skills and mobility, and in lifelong learning.

The European context

The European Union has for several years been concerned to put in place an appropriate strategic framework to oversee the changes to work, employment and the economy which are taking place.

The EU-wide employment crisis of the 1990s led to the development of the first European Employment Strategy, launched in 1997. This identified four common priority areas, including employability ('making sure people can develop the right skills to take up job opportunities in a fast-changing world') and adaptability ('developing new flexible ways of working to reconcile security and flexibility')

The European Employment Strategy was redefined in 2002, when three overarching objectives were established: full employment, quality and productivity at work, and the strengthening of social cohesion and inclusion. Two of the ten accompanying guidelines are particularly relevant to the theme of this report[1]:

- Address change and promote adaptability and mobility in the labour market
- Promote development of human capital and lifelong learning

The influential Employment Taskforce chaired by Wim Kok, set up to review the progress of the European Employment Strategy, issued its report in November 2003. Among other things, it was critical of the lack of progress made in encouraging adaptability[2]. It talked of market failure

[1] European Council, Decision of 22 July 2003 on guidelines for the employment policies of the member states. (2003/578/EC)
[2] Jobs, jobs, jobs: Creating more employment in Europe, report of the Employment Taskforce, November 2003

in ensuring that sufficient investment was being made for continuing training and lifelong learning for individual workers.

Partly in response, the European Commission and European Council stressed again in 2004 the importance for the European Employment Strategy of investing more, and more effectively, in human capital and of increasing the adaptability of workers, as two of four key areas for action in the immediate time ahead[3].

These themes link directly to recent European-level initiatives in the area of skills and mobility. Following the *High Level Task Force on Skills and Mobility* report in 2001, the European Commission's own Action Plan for skills and mobility was published in February 2002. This talked of the need for "a labour force which has the necessary skills as well as the capacity to adapt and acquire new knowledge throughout their working life". It added, "Strategies for lifelong learning and mobility are essential…"[4]

The progress of implementation of the Action Plan has been subject to a review document published by the Commission early in 2004.

Closely related is a second initiative on the promotion of lifelong learning. The Feira European Council in June 2000 called on member states, the Council of Ministers and the Commission to "identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all". Lifelong learning has been seen as a key part in helping to achieve the Lisbon objective of making Europe – in the much quoted phrase – 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world". The Commission report *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*[5] was published in November 2001. This calls for the social partners to be actively involved in the development, promotion and use of learning. Trade unions are identified, along with public service providers, voluntary and community groups and employers, as having a role to play in delivering and/or promoting learning opportunities to their own members.

The actual level of take-up of training across European Union member states, however, remains depressingly low. According to the European Commission there was a total participation rate of just 8.5% in the year 2002 among 25-64 year old adults, in the pre-enlargement EU15 member states. This figure has not changed in recent years. The European Union has now set a benchmark figure of 12.5%, as a goal to be achieved by 2010.

[3] European Commission, Strengthening the implementation of the European Employment Strategy, 7 April 2004 COM(2004) 239
[4] Commission's Action Plan for skills and mobility COM (2002) 72, published 8 February 2002
[5] European Commission, Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality COM (2001) 678, 21 November 2001

The participation rate in training is admittedly somewhat greater for workers with higher education qualifications – though the overall percentage for the EU-15 region is still no more than 15%. Some countries (notably Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom) do rather better, recording figures of over 30%.[6]

In terms of the specific need to improve lifelong learning in ICT skills (e-skills), an ICT Skills Monitoring Group was established in late 2001 to research the demand for ICT and e-business skills in Europe, reporting in 2002.[7] Following this, and an initial European e-skills conference, the European Commission established in 2003 a European e-skills Forum. The Forum issued its own report in 2004 in time for the European e-skills Conference in Thessalonica in the autumn of 2004. This report makes a number of recommendations, including the need for a long-term strategic approach to the ICT sector in Europe. It also makes the following point:

"Concerns… arise from the fact that jobs are beginning to be lost at the more professional levels of occupational activity. The jobs involved are at the higher knowledge economy end of the scale: the very part of the occupational spectrum where common aspirations for future economic activity and so employment growth within the European Union… lie."

These various connected themes have been addressed in social dialogue between the social partners at European level. Social dialogue between employers' representatives and trade unions was incorporated in 1988 into the Single European Act, and since then issues of vocational training and employability have been the focus of frequent discussions within the social dialogue process between the employers' organisation UNICE, the public enterprise association CEEP and the European Trade Union Confederation.

A new joint text on lifelong learning, Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competencies and Qualifications, was signed between the European social partners in spring 2002 (follow-up statements have also been produced in 2003 and 2004) . Among other things the 2002 statement makes the following observation:

[6] European Commission, Report on the Implementation of the Commission's Action Plan for skills and mobility COM (2004) 66

[7] ICT Skills Monitoring Group: Synthesis report – E-business and ICT skills in Europe (June 2002); E-business and ICT skills in Europe, benchmarking member state policy initiatives (October 2002)

"To promote a lifelong learning culture, both trade union and employer organisations have a key role to play in informing, supporting and advising their members and need to develop in-house expertise to perform this role"[8].

We can summarise, therefore, by restating that the themes of employability, adaptability and lifelong learning are high on the political agenda within Europe. The rest of this report turns now to focus more particularly on the specific needs of professionals and managerial workers, and how these are being addressed by trade unions in Europe.

Trade unions and the needs of professional and managerial staff

Surveying members' needs

This immediately raises a question: what are those particular needs? What do these workers themselves consider to be their needs: what, for example, would they consider to be the most useful services that could be made available to them by their union, to enable them to adapt to the changing world of work? It makes sense to try to find out.

A number of trade unions have chosen to undertake detailed studies, which in many cases aim to go beyond a simple needs analysis exercise. One of the most ambitious such studies was the survey organised in 2002 by the French union CFDT Cadres. The survey, *Travail en question Cadres*, involved the distribution of 30,000 questionnaires of which 7,000 of which were returned completed. The aim, according to the union, was to gain a deeper understanding of the working conditions and concerns of professionals, to get away from the stereotype that all cadres necessarily had the same work experience, and – as CFDT Cadres put it – to let professionals and managers speak for themselves.

Interestingly, CFDT Cadres' study reached out beyond the ranks of the unionised: seven out of every ten questionnaires returned came from non-union members.

Four key issues emerged – those surveyed wanted their contribution at work to be better recognised, they wanted the opportunity to improve their professional skills and qualifications and progress their careers, they argued for a more professional approach by employers to the annual appraisal mechanism, and they wanted the right to participate fully in strategic management decisions affecting their areas of responsibility. The role of the union was seen

[8] ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP: Framework of Actions for the Lielong Development of Competencies and Qualifications

as protection against arbitrary management power and blunders, and as providing an arena for information dissemination and exchange.

CFDT Cadres has since used the findings in a report Managers at work (*Les cadres au travail*). The findings have also been made available to external specialists.

The Finnish union for graduate engineers TEK annually surveys those of its members who are 32, 40 and 50 years old, these being the key ages, it believes, in individuals' career development paths. The survey focuses on members' competencies, competency development and career development plans. Questions include the skills and competencies which members feel are needed for career progression, and the extent to which their employers currently enable them to obtain these competencies through training.

Another Finnish engineering union, Insinöörliitto IL, has also researched members' perceived training and career development needs, as part of its annual member survey.

The Italian banking and insurance union FIBA-CISL, which investigated the attitudes and expectations of professional and managerial workers in a survey undertaken in 1999, has more recently undertaken a detailed research exercise specifically among women professionals. This survey, undertaken in the autumn of 2003, elicited responses from about 230 women. Among other things FIBA-CISL explored women's perceived expectations for their career progression in the immediate future, their views on access to professional training, and the part they believed the union should play in assisting their career development. Interestingly, a large majority of respondents did believe that the union had a role to play, in full or in part, in this respect.

In Denmark, the finance union Finansforbundet undertook, also in Autumn 2003 , a survey of managers' attitudes to change management. (This followed a survey a year earlier, in partnership with other unions in the Danish FTF federation, on training and career development needs). The results of the survey (which, among others, asked members how the union could assist in the management of change) received press attention in Denmark and were used to help plan training courses targeted at managers in the finance sector.

Members differed in their views on the ability of the union to assist during a process of change. Finansforbundet was felt to be good at encouraging constructive dialogue with management and with arranging management courses; however, half the respondents also felt that the union could do more to inspire and assist its members who were in the position of dealing with change.

Career development

If, as has been suggested above, the familiar linear career path forward is no longer necessarily applicable to the changing realities of work, what can be done to assist professional and managerial staff to manage their own career development?

A number of trade unions have introduced innovative services for members. The British telecom managers' union Connect, for example, launched its Opus² Careers Advice counselling service in January 2002. Opus² makes use of qualified and experienced counsellors, and two programmes are currently offered, one on career assessment and the other on getting interviews. Each programme takes about four to six weeks to work through, and is based on a set of five 40 minute counselling sessions which take place either by phone or face-to-face. The cost of the programme for Connect members (about €290) is lower than equivalent commercial services, and it is preceded by a free half-hour session, to allow the individual to assess its suitability for their needs. Hourly career counselling is also available (€100 ph).

Connect originally introduced Opus² for its own members, but now makes it available (at a slightly higher price) to members of other trade unions and (at a higher price) to non-union members.

Another British union, Prospect, makes use of Opus² but also has its own CareerPlus career development programme, delivered to members as a series of web-based worksheets. CareerPlus includes modules on continuing professional development, skills, training and mentoring, and applying for jobs. Members work through the material in their own time.

SIF (Sweden) has had many years' experience in helping members in career development. For example, it made use early on of the internet to deliver the Career coach (Karriärcoach) service to members. This is a web-based tool designed to help individuals analyse their working life prospects. SIF members receive a password from the union and can then work their way in their own time through the programme. This is one of a number of innovative developmental tools which SIF has developed for delivery to members over the internet or on CD-ROM.

SIF also provides career coaching to members on an individual basis through face-to-face meetings.

Also in Scandinavia, the Finnish union Insinöörliitto IL offers both web-based advice to members on how to apply for better jobs and more traditional courses, on topics such as career development and job applications. Insinöörliitto IL offers legal advice to members who are negotiating their contracts and salaries with new employers.

TEK (Finland) also provides a Careers Service for its 60,000 members. As it explains: "We can help you analyse your professional experiences and personal strengths. Choosing what career path to follow will then become easier for you. We can assist you in finding information on existing possibilities for further education and training. You are also welcome to attend our career events, organised and tailored to the needs of our members."

In Norway, the engineers' union FLT is currently developing a career development programme for members. This will offer both personal advice and on-line resources for career planning.

Finansforbundet in Denmark is another union to offer help in career development and in personal and professional development for managers. This ranges from individual advice and guidance (for example, on appropriate lifelong learning options) to whole day or after-work sessions on particular subjects relevant to professional staff. Finansforbundet says that this has proved a popular initiative, with in recent years approximately 15% of the union's members in professional and managerial posts participating each year.

The Belgian union for professionals LBC-NVK has for several years offered its members career management workshops. Currently, two sessions are held each year, each open to 25 participants. The union hopes to extend this initiative from January 2005, to enable about 200 members each year to have access to this service.

Employment agencies

In many countries, trade unions in the past played an important role in directly finding work for members. This tradition was associated particularly with craft-based unions, as part of the mechanisms used to control access to particular professions and to prevent dilution of professional skills. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, if some unions are now looking to recreate a similar service for their own professional and technical staff members.

TEK (Finland) operates a Recruitment Service for its members, using the union's website. Employers can advertise current job vacancies for engineers and technical professionals on the site, without charge. Members can access this database, but can also submit on-line their own CVs (in Finnish and in English). These CVs are searchable by employers looking for new members of staff.

A very similar service is provided by another Finnish union, Insinöörliitto IL.

Connect (UK) decided to set up its own employment agency in the early 1990s, at a time when large numbers of Connect's members were being offered voluntary redundancy by British Telecom. The vast majority had only ever worked for BT, and found the prospect of looking for work elsewhere daunting.

As with the career coaching service, Connect uses the name Opus² for this service. Opus² operates in a very similar way to commercial employment agencies. Candidates provide it with a completed registration form, CV etc, and this information is held on database to be matched against future vacancies. Advice is offered on how to produce an effective professional CV. One-to-one discussions are held with candidates, which provide an opportunity to discuss the range of options available; this could include, for example, moving to working on a freelance contractor basis. If so, legal advice on establishing a limited company is available.

Vacancies are advertised on the Opus² website. Connect says that one advantage of the employment agency is that encourages members who are leaving their employment to maintain their loyalty to the union. Opus² also charges employers when posts are filled, at the standard rate of 20% of first year's annual salary.

In France, the five major union federations have come together, along with the employers' organisation MEDEF, to create a non-profit organisation APEC, *l'Association pour l'emploi des cadres* (Association for the employment of professional and managerial workers). APEC offers a major web-based employment service for cadres (and also for young people with professional qualifications). It claims to have been used to date by 25,000 companies and 400,000 individuals. At any one time, around 10,000 jobs are likely to be posted on the website; individuals can also post their own CVs. APEC is available to all cadres, including those who are not affiliated to the participating unions.

Salary comparators

Whilst pay is, in many European countries, traditionally a subject for collective bargaining, this is increasingly less true, particularly for professional workers and those at managerial level. Unfortunately, the power imbalance between companies and individual employees potentially renders individuals vulnerable to accepting pay which is below the going rate. This is even more true in the case of negotiations undertaken by contractors and the self-employed.

A number of unions have begun steps to try to counter this. CFDT Cadres (France), for example offers OSCAR (*Observatoire du Salaire des CAdres et de leurs Revenus*), a facility which enables members to monitor and analyse the evolution of their wages during the past five years, and to make a comparison with standards in their professional sector.

In Switzerland, //syndikat, an on-line trade union organisation which links IT professionals in the notoriously individualistic new technology sector, encourages both members and would-be members to check for themselves how their pay compares with the industry average, by using the Salary Checker software programme on its website. The information on Salary Checker becomes more valuable the more people use it and contribute their own data. //syndikat says that, with pay details already entered by several thousand workers, the Salary Checker database has now become statistically representative of the sector.

Similar ideas to //syndikat's have been developed by unions in Austria and the Netherlands. The most ambitious is the Wage Indicator facility, based at the www.wageindicator.org website, which was launched in July 2004. The Dutch union federation FNV is one of the partners in this project, which offers pay comparison data for 1700 professions. The Wage Indicator project also has partners in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK.

Provision of training courses and lifelong learning

As we have seen, even though the importance of lifelong learning has been a constant theme of European employment initiatives, the actual percentage of European workers obtaining training is extremely low. One problem, perhaps, is the management thinking which continues to view vocational training – even for professionals and managerial staff – as a business cost, not as an investment.

Unions can contribute in several different ways to the extension of training provision for members. Firstly, for many unions this is an important issue to be raised during the collective bargaining process. The Belgian managerial and professional union LBC-NVK speaks for many when it says, "Training and retraining are such fundamental rights that we try at all costs to establish these rights in collective agreements, both at company and sector level".

Naturally, unions in many countries are also actively engaged in bipartite (union/employer) and tripartite (government/union/employer) organisations and initiatives to promote vocational training. In France, for example, CFDT Cadres plays a key role in CESI, Centre d'Enseignement Scientifique et Industriel, the body which coordinates the training of engineers, technicians and cadres. Similarly, the Portuguese bank union SBSI participates in the Portuguese vocational training institute for the banking sector, whilst in Spain the UGT is a partner in the 2004 Plan for continuing vocational training.

Unions are also developing partnerships with educational institutions. SIF (Sweden) reports that it "co-operates with local universities and university colleges in Sweden in order to offer members possibilities to participate in specific curricula and courses. An example, where there have been places reserved for SIF members, is a course in project management. SIF pays for the training, and the employer lets the member participate in the course during working hours."

Unions also themselves put on a wide range of training courses for their own members. Whilst these include more traditional courses designed for union activists on such topics as representing members and occupational health and safety, unions are increasingly focusing on servicing their members' needs for professional qualifications.

SIF, for example, arranges about fifteen educational seminars a year designed specifically for professionals and managerial staff, each focusing on a key work-related issue. In Finland, TEK currently arranges about 35 training workshops and lectures each year, tailored to the needs of its members. Another Scandinavian union, HTF (Sweden), also runs seminars and courses for managers. As the HTF puts it, "We help such members to create networks and develop their skills in subjects that are important to them".

The Norwegian managers and technicians union FLT has gone even further, establishing the Addisco organisation and website specifically dedicated to delivering professional training. A range of courses can be accessed through Addisco at a range of levels, including an MBA in Technology Management. This MBA course was originally developed in Australia by the engineers and scientists trade union APESMA, in conjunction with Australian universities. Addisco has adapted this for the needs of Norwegian students. A number of British unions have also made this MBA available to their members.

Other unions also arrange training provision for professional and managerial staff. The UK union PCS provides on-line training facilities for members in its open learning centre in central London. SBSI (Portugal) annually arrange a training programme for banking managers and professionals, focusing on current changes in the sector. These include traditional training courses but also seminars and workshops.

SBSI has also identified the particular needs of young people who are concerned to improve their professional skills and qualifications to increase their career development prospects, and who are keen participants in many of SBSI's training initiatives. The union says that, whilst there is a cost in providing training, this is repaid in the level of commitment which as a consequence young members of SBSI feel towards their union.

Freelance and autonomous workers

If the age of e-commerce is to be a time for the 'e-lance' worker, as Tom Malone of MIT has suggested, organisations which claim to be agents of industrial relations may need to address this constituency. It is particularly an issue for unions organising professional staff, where numbers of formerly employed staff have chosen to set themselves up as independent contractors, sometimes delivering services back to their former employer.

Unions are naturally concerned to ensure that companies do not attempt to shed their social and legal obligations towards employees by encouraging forms of pseudo-self-employment, where the individuals affected are in reality still in a quasi-employee relationship to the business.

But there are also many workers who are operating at professional level who are choosing voluntarily to work on a genuinely self-employed basis. Many of them will have been trade union members previously – the question is to what extent are unions adapting to be able to service the needs of these workers.

A number of trade union bodies are already engaged in this issue, including UNI itself which has arranged a number of round-table meetings on the subject, most recently in May 2004.

In the Netherlands, FNV-Bondgenoten has chosen to create a new union specifically for self-employed people. This union was established in 2000, had a thousand members enrolled by

the end of 2001 and currently (2004) has about 5750 members. The decision was taken partly because of the numbers of FNV-Bondgenoten members who were currently employees but who wanted to become self-employed and who asked to maintain their union membership.

The number of self-employed people in the Netherlands has increased strongly in the past two decades. The new union aims to help its self-employed members by servicing their particular needs, including tax matters, social security, business insurance, accounting and finance and networking. It works with, among others, the FNV-affiliated building sector union, which also has about 5000 self-employed members.

The decision to organise the self-employed was initially not without opposition within the union, with some members arguing that self-employed workers took over existing jobs and undermined collective agreements. In practice, however, there have been a number of benefits, not least that the union is now better informed through its network of self-employed workers of developments within companies, and is better able to monitor the establishment of new companies.

SIF (Sweden) has a similar story to tell. SIF debated the issue of self-employed members in 1996 and after what was described as a lively debate agreed to admit them to the union. The new arrangement began in 1998. In Sweden as in the Netherlands many union members had lost their previous jobs, and had been encouraged to become self-employed.

SIF currently has about 3000 freelance members. Initially the union offered financial marketing support to aid recruitment, and during 2002 ran a successful telemarketing recruitment campaign. Currently, the aim is for the freelance sector of the union to be self-financing. The main attractions of union membership are a good-value insurance package and a legal advice service which can assist in areas such as drawing up contracts or taking court action.

SIF points out, though, that self-employed members require individual servicing, which may lead to an individualisation of trade union service provision. This can have implications for trade union resources and internal organisation.

In Germany, ver.di has seen marked growth in the number of its self-employed members, standing at about 33,000 in the summer of 2004.
These members have access to all the usual range of services available to ver.di members, but also have services particularly tailored to their needs, including a dedicated website. The union says that it is concerned to treat the self-employed as professional workers, and not as second-class workers. Ver.di's own staff are being trained to raise their awareness of self-employment issues, such as contracts.

In Denmark, HK has about 5,000-6,000 freelance members out of a total membership of 370,000. These include accountants, IT professionals, graphic designers and interpreters. HK has produced a detailed handbook for freelances, the only one currently on the market in Denmark, which is successfully sold to non-HK members. HK has also established a dedicated website, www.freelancer.dk.

CFDT Cadres (France) is also piloting a *Réseau Professionnels autonomes (RPO)* (network for independent professionals), a three-year experiment which the union launched in September 2002. The network (initially focused on Paris and its region) aims to offer members access to professional information and legal assistance as part of their membership subscription, and will also make additional services (such as social insurance and pensions) available at additional cost.

CFDT Cadres says that the RPO initiative aims to demonstrate that unions have a role in the whole world of work, and can represent individuals working in new ways. Among the target professions for the RPO are independent consultants, graphical designers, software engineers and freelance journalists. These are well educated and qualified people which the union says exist at the margins of the employed workforce and whose rights need to be better protected. However, the RPO pilot has found it difficult to persuade freelances of the value of membership. It currently has about 300 members.

In the UK and Ireland, the recently created Amicus (and before that, one of its constituent unions MSF) has organised self-employed IT consultants in its Information Technology Professionals Association since 1995. The ITPA is an autonomous section of the union with several thousand members. It provides specialist advice and the opportunity for networking by IT professionals. It has also helped the union break into and organise companies where this had previously been difficult or impossible.

International mobility

As the European Commission's Action plan for skills and mobility makes clear, a European knowledge-based economy is likely to be built increasingly on a mobile labour force, with increasing worker mobility between member states. This is also a theme picked up in the new European Employment Strategy, adopted by the EU Council in summer 2003.

Since trade unions have developed as organisations based in nation states, with their structures and service delivery mechanisms focused on addressing a membership within their own country, the growth in the number of workers working across national boundaries clearly poses new challenges. Professional staff, in particular, are increasingly likely to find themselves working abroad for part of their working life.

Individual unions are therefore increasingly developing their services in response. TEK (Finland) is one example. TEK reports that "We assist our members in finding a job abroad, and give advice on international job-seeking channels. We publish guides and give information and advice on living and working conditions in other EU countries, as well as countries outside the EU."

In France, the bipartite organisation *l'Association pour l'emploi des cadres* APEC (see above) is coordinating work to support managerial and professional workers working in other EU states and in the USA.

This is also an area for international trade union coordination. UNI itself has established the UNI Passport scheme, calling it "key in the solidarity strategy aimed at helping unionised mobile workers to face the challenges of the 21st century." The idea is that members of one union can apply for a UNI Passport which will enable them to call on the services of a UNI-affiliated union in the country where they will be working.

The degree of support available varies between individual unions, who can choose to what extent they are able participate in the scheme. UNI is currently inviting affiliates to create a special 'Passport' page on their own website, to help potential users of the scheme know the level of assistance available. One pioneering example of a union 'Passport' webpage is that produced by FABI (Italy), available at www.fabi.it/passport/inglese/index.htm

Eurocadres has also an on-line guide for mobile workers in Europe, geared particularly at professional and managerial workers. This handbook is accessible through its website as www.eurocadres.org/mobilnet.

Communicating with professional workers: maximising the opportunities of new technology

Much has already been said in this report about initiatives which make use of new technology, including innovative uses of websites and of multimedia technology tools such as interactive CD-ROMs.

Almost all unions now use email and websites as a tool in their relationship with members. In responses to the survey which accompanied the preparation of this report, unions across Europe – from PAM in Finland to SBSI in Portugal – stressed the importance to them of using email and websites in communicating with members in professional and managerial posts. Password-protected areas on websites for member use only are seen as a particularly valuable resource.

The UK union Connect is typical of the replies received. It reports: "Connect has email addresses for close to 80% of our members. Email is now our primary means of communicating with members, and indeed non-members when we have their email addresses. The website is used in an associated way. For instance, email invitations to join the union involve a URL [a web address] to our website where they can sign up on line. An increasing proportion of new members now sign up this way. We also use email and the Internet to conduct regular e-ballots on pay settlements and other negotiating issues. Turnout in these e-ballots usually exceeds 60%, well above the average for union ballots in the UK."

Mobile phone texting is another technological tool being tried out. FABI (Italy), for example, is exploring the use of text messaging as a way of reaching managerial members at Findomestic banca.

Finansforbundet (Denmark) reports that members can access their own membership records via the union home page, in order to update or correct the data held. PCS (UK) uses almost entirely electronic means to communicate with those members who have joined its Professional and Managers Association (PMA), established by the union in 2001. PCS says that, since PMA members are likely to be very busy people, using electronic means of communication was seen as the most non-intrusive and cost-effective way of maintaining contact.

The resources available on websites can also be complemented by a call centre operation. The German union ver.di and its predecessor unions have considerable experience of this, having established the pioneering telework helpline service, OnForTe (Online Forum Telearbeit) in 1997. OnForTe aimed to offer the public, including non union members, the self-employed and works council members, an access point for information about all aspects of telework. Simple queries were dealt with by the call centre agents, with more specialist enquiries passed to a second tier of advisers who could assist on issues such as legal rights,

telework contractual agreements and problems of self-employment. ver.di also runs Mediafon, a similar call centre operation for media workers.

Some trade unions are choosing to go a stage further and use new technology at a more strategic level as a way of improving the service they offer professionals and managerial workers. The Austrian services union GPA has developed a set of new interest groups within the union, using the facilities of the www.interesse.at website. Professional workers, for example, have access via the website to the work@professional interest group. There are also similar special interest groups for flexible workers, including the self-employed (work@flex), for social service staff (work@social), for workers in IT (work@IT), for education workers (work@education), for mobile workers operating away from their office base (work@external) and for migrant workers (work@migration). Each interest group has its own website section, offering access to information, news and on-line discussion forums.

GPA sees these interest groups as a new, third, dimension in the internal democratic life of the union, complementing the traditional regional and sectoral structures. Members can self-select the interest group they feel is appropriate to their work. The interest groups are recognised in the GPA constitution and are autonomous; each group has the right to have delegate representation on the GPA Executive Committee and the GPA Forum.

Work@professional was one of the first interest groups to be established. GPA points out that Austria has about 150,000 professional and managerial workers in the private sector, of whom about 30,000 are GPA members. These are people who hold key positions in business and in society, and the union sees them as also playing an important role in the union's development.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of a union making the web the central focus of its work, and indeed of its very existence, is the Swiss 'virtual' trade union //syndikat, mentioned above, Founded in January 2002. //syndikat aims to organise employees and freelances working on-line, in areas such as new technology, IT, finance and the service sector. It seeks to obtain for its members proper work conditions, better protection against workplace stress, professional and personal development and, for freelances, the fees due to them for their work.

Concluding remarks: broader issues for trade union organisation

To organise professional workers successfully and appropriately, unions need to understand their needs and concerns. The sense of collective solidarity is likely to be weaker than for other

groups of workers, and there may be less of a tradition of union organisation on which unions can build. Professionals expect unions themselves to be professional, and to deliver the services members need in an efficient way.

The point to understand is that there is competition for the services unions can offer. The table below[9] seeks to identify the likely work-related needs which a professional worker – perhaps working on a contract basis rather than in a traditional employment relationship, perhaps working away from a central workplace, perhaps working for a number of different clients – could be expected to have. Whilst in many ways these needs resemble those which are currently met through the familiar industrial relations structures, other agencies could (and do) step in to service them: a problem at work could be guarded against in the same way, say, as a motorist arranges vehicle breakdown protection or a householder organises a service contract for domestic appliances.

Negotiation on pay or contract fee	• Agents • Commercial training courses in negotiating skills/assertiveness for individuals negotiating for themselves
Health and safety advice	• Commercial telephone helplines • Web based advice services • Specialist consultants • Doctors
Employment rights	• Attorneys/lawyers • Specialist consultants • Commercial telephone helplines
Disciplinary representation	• Attorneys/lawyers • Specialist consultants
Taxation advice	• Accountants • Commercial helplines • Specialist tax advisory services
Social activities	• Web-based associations • Informal networks • More focus on neighbourhood rather than workplace socialising
Legal advice	• Attorneys/lawyers • Legal insurance (perhaps as add-on to other insurance)
Psychological and physical health	• Doctors/health services • Private practice therapists
Pensions/social protection	• Private insurance companies • Private financial advisers/brokers
Equal opportunities	• Specialist consultants

[9] From work by Andrew Bibby for the World Employment Report 2001 (International Labour Organization)

	• Commercial telephone helplines
Finding work	• Informal networks • Web based services (monster.com etc) • Professional associations/member co-operatives
Providing access to training	• Educational institutions • Commercial training providers

These service providers may operate as commercial ventures, or as non-profit professional mutual associations or societies. In each case, however, they are effectively competing with trade unions' own services, and as a consequence threaten membership income and organising muscle.

Trade unions, therefore, do not have a 'divine right' to exist. Nevertheless unions can benefit if they seek to maximise the opportunities which come from the established representational functions they undertake in many sectors and companies, and from the access they already enjoy in many workplaces as a recognised social partner.

As we saw when discussing the work being undertaken with the self-employed, unions which aim to meet these new challenges may need to reconsider the way in which they are internally organised. Instead of servicing a group of workers collectively through, for example, the collective bargaining process, individual professional and managerial workers are more likely to require individual attention – and this of course can be expensive in terms of staffing and other resources. A union attempting to adequately serve the needs of professional workers is likely to have to undertake a significant review of its own staffing and operating structures.

There are implications, too, for the democratic structures of trade unions. In the same way that traditional hierarchical structures may prove less appropriate for companies than in the past, so unions too may find that their traditional hierarchical structures come under pressure. The assumption must be, at least as far as professional and managerial workers are concerned, that traditional union structures based around meetings of branches or locals will tend increasingly to appear less satisfactory as mechanisms for democratic life, not least because mobile working and teleworking is likely to mean that workers are physically together much less frequently than in the past.

We have already seen, in the example of the role given to interest groups within the structure of the GPA in Austria, how one union is beginning to tackle this issue. It should also be noted that new forms of electronic communication permit networking between individual union members, wherever they may live, much more easier than in the past and therefore offer new possibilities for the internal democratic life of a union.

Finally, unions are likely to find themselves increasingly needing to overcome the limitations which they have as organisations based within single nation states. Multinational companies already operate effortlessly beyond national boundaries, and – partly as a consequence – professional workers are increasingly geographically mobile, across frontiers. Unions in the twenty-first century will have to demonstrate a new-found practical, as well as ideological, commitment to internationalism.

There are, then, some significant challenges facing trade unions, particularly those looking to organise professional workers. Nevertheless, at a time when work experiences are changing rapidly, trade unions continue to have a potentially significant role to play in helping meet the employability and adaptability needs of these workers. This report has attempted to demonstrate that many unions are already many steps down the road to achieving this objective.