

Supporting women returning to work - a European perspective

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Throughout Europe the high level of unemployment of adults has necessitated the provision of retraining programs aimed at providing adults with skills appropriate for the work place, and to improve their opportunities to gain employment. The aim of this project, which is funded through the European Commission LEONARDO program, is to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of Return to Work programs across Europe in assisting women trainees to make a sustainable return to employment, and to identify good practice both in training provision and recruitment of new employees. Using questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the project collected comparative data on the perspectives of women trainees, training providers and employers in the four participant countries – France, Spain, Ireland and the UK.

The needs of women returners in relation to their participation and progress in the labour market and the implications for training course design have been well documented. This paper develops these themes by tracking women returners from training programs into employment and investigating the skills developed in relation to employers' needs. Drawing upon interview data from the four countries, key elements which contribute to the development of training courses which are responsive to the needs of employers and women returners are identified. It is argued that the participation for employers in course design and delivery specifically in relation to the provision of work placements is vital.

The outcomes of this research are guidelines in good practice in program design for training providers and recommendations for the effective transition of women returning to the workplace.