



Brussels, May 5, 2009

JOINT DECLARATION ON TRAINING AND QUALIFICATION IN THE GROUND-HANDLING SECTOR

Introduction

The European Social Partners (ESP) of the Ground-Handling sector (ACI, AEA, ERA, IACA, IAHA and ETF) jointly organised, with the financial support of the European Community (DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities), a conference on best practices on training and qualifications in the ground handling sector in Granada on 24 and 25 June 2008. The conference highlighted the evolution of the European ground handling sector and the link between training, safety and the quality of service.

Following the conference, ESP recognise that the development of staff' skills is an essential factor to deliver safe and qualitative services. A priority is to recognise the proficiency of the employees, thereby improving their employability and facilitating the adaptation of the companies, which are confronted to new challenges in an international economy.

The aviation sector is one of the most important employers in Europe and the ground-handling sector employs a significant number of people in that sector. The aviation sector including the ground handling sector has, for several years, been faced with fundamental transformation, in which a critical factor is the workforce.

Taking this into account, ESP generally agree that it is vitally important to their industry that workers have the necessary skills and qualifications to meet the challenges of a sustainable aviation market. They have decided to examine several examples of good practice in a study conducted on behalf of social partners in 2008.

This declaration takes its place in having a first and common understanding, examining joint initiatives deriving from the results of the study.

1- ESP ARE COMMITTED TO VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS THROUGH SOCIAL DIALOGUE

ESP are both convinced vocational training, regularly and appropriate further training and lifelong learning over the entire working life is crucial for each employee in order to maintain his or her employability. "Ad-hoc" vocational training is the tool to deliver this improvement.

ESP aim connecting training and the development of skills with the professional activities. In this framework, ESP promote the validation of training and the recognition of skills.

ESP are committed to creating a well-trained and qualified workforce.

ESP recognise that involvement of trade union and staff representatives through social dialogue is paramount to the success of vocational training and qualifications.

2- PROPOSALS FOR A WAY FORWARD

In order to enhance successful joint working on training and qualifications, ESP are in agreement on the following:

- a. There has to be a clear commitment from both sides at the same time to adhere to the existing and regularly updated best European standards of training and qualification. In order to support that, the ESP will promote the development of the social dialogue at all levels in order to strengthen trust, build confidence and enhance cooperation and to examine any further joint initiatives/arrangements/agreements.
- b. ESP recognise their joint responsibility in matters concerning adequate training, development of skills and professional career paths. They encourage regular information and consultations of trade unions, works councils and staff representatives on the development of training and education schemes. Where possible, they also encourage negotiations.
- c. ESP reiterate that the European Social Dialogue is an appropriate forum to further assess, discuss and negotiate the developments of ground handling and wishes and concerns of either signatory party in order to establish minimum standards at EU level. ESP wish to increase the innovative strength of the industry, the safety and the quality of the services as well as the recognition of the qualification of the employees. For all the above reasons and in a phasing approach, ESP agree:
 - o to define, through an agreement *, the best standards of training at European level, allowing that more specific rules could be set up at all other levels;
 - o to further work on the validation of vocational training** and the involvement of other related parties (European institutions, national authorities, etc);
 - o to identify appropriate joint follow-up mechanisms of implementation of the above.
 - o As part of the ground handling social dialogue at national level, ESP recommend that national social partners should use of general opportunities to obtain public funding for training related activities.

Each year at the last Social Dialogue meeting, ESP will assess the progress made as regards the content of this declaration.

** Agreement should be understood as an implementation of the Article 2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Civil Aviation Sectoral Dialogue Committee (adopted on 10 June 2003), which states that the aim of the Committee is "to encourage and develop the social dialogue in the meaning of the European Treaties in the Civil Aviation sector in order to contribute to the development of employment and to the harmonisation and improvement of the living and working conditions of the workers in this sector. This could lead, if the two sides consider it desirable, to relations based on agreement". In other words, the signatory parties refer to an autonomous agreement between them.*

***By vocational training the ESP mean training for specific vocations in the industry that are relevant for the companies.*