Special report 10/2012 (2011 discharge): Effectiveness of staff development in the European Commission

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PURPOSE: the drawing up of a Special Report (No. 10/2012) on the Effectiveness of Staff Development in the European Commission.

CONTENT: the Commission depends upon its 33 000 staff in order to achieve its objectives. To perform effectively, staff members need to acquire and maintain up-to-date skills through training, informal learning and job moves. This is particularly important in the Commission because of the long career and low turnover of its permanent staff.

Conclusions of the Court of Auditors' audit: in this Special Report (No 10/2012), the European Court of Auditors concludes that the Commission does not have sufficient consolidated information on the existing skills of its staff or the skills which they need. While the Commission does provide a wide range of opportunities for staff to develop, it does not sufficiently track staff participation rates, skills acquisition or the utility of the training back in the workplace.

The Special Report is the result of a performance audit that found that staff development plans at the level of both the organisation and the individual are not sharply focused on organisational objectives.

The Commission has not created a sufficiently strong learning environment to capitalise on the learning offer. **Staff attend only 35% of courses on their training maps**; 30% of staff attend fewer than two days' training; there are high levels of absences and dropouts from language courses; and older staff on higher grades participate in less training.

The Commission's own staff and managers deliver some training, but not enough to demonstrate that the organisation attaches a high value to staff development. The organisation provides limited support to apply new skills in the workplace and the appraisal and promotion system does not give sufficient recognition to those who learn and apply new skills.

The Commission measures the satisfaction of staff with development actions. It also makes some attempts to evaluate the utility of development actions in the workplace. However, **it rarely asks managers for their opinion on the effectiveness of training,** and it makes little use of objective indicators.

The Commission does not evaluate the impact of development actions on organisational results and so does not have the information necessary to demonstrate the contribution of development actions to achieving organisational objectives.

The Court's recommendations: the Court has prepared a series of recommendations to the Commission which may be summarised as follows:

- the Commission should ensure it has sufficient consolidated information on existing staff skills and on those needed to meet future challenges and prepare a strategy which convincingly demonstrates how learning and development will contribute to the achievement of organisational goals;
- it should support this process through improvements to the systems for planning training and job moves;

- it should develop its systems for monitoring participation in development actions;
- it should address the issue of underperformance and encourage greater participation in the wide range of development opportunities available while recognising staff who develop their skills and those of others;
- it should test and certify the acquisition of new skills where practicable, and support their application in the workplace by providing follow up activities;
- it should evaluate how effectively development actions provide staff with new skills which they are able to apply in the workplace.