
EMF contribution to the upcoming report on “Industrial change and prospects for the powered two-wheeler industry in Europe” prepared by the EESC

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Avoiding dismissals during this crisis does not only serve the interests of employees, it also serves companies' in the long run. Acting on their own initiative, many companies have trained their staff themselves, since there is a lack of alternative solutions. Dismissing the very employees they invest in via training represents a considerable financial loss for them the effects of which are lasting.

The distinguishing features of the motorcycle industry in Europe are the safety of the vehicles and accessories, the high quality of the products and the high technical standards. In order to preserve these standards, a well-trained, independent and motivated workforce is crucial.

In times of crisis, with reduced revenues and order intakes, there is a real danger of wage costs being reduced and general cut backs, or worse, of relocating production to so-called “low-cost-countries”. But, very often, the employer considerably underestimates the impact this has on product quality, on workers' moral and the extent of the costs of knowledge transfer.

A break in the value chain would reduce the sector's capacity for innovation and destroy the smoothly working cooperation. The ability to react swiftly to market requirements would disappear, too.

The motorbike could replace the car as a status symbol, or another possibility would be the motorbike becoming firmly anchored in the different mobility concepts. However, in the coming months, it will first be necessary to survive the economic crisis. Redundancies must be prevented so as to ensure that the existing opportunities can be exploited.

Shoring up jobs must be the primary concern. All national government measures should be supported by the European Union. For the future it is important to establish a coordinated and efficient procedure in Europe. In this respect, a framework has to be established for strengthening employment in the sector and ensuring working conditions are good. As mentioned above, well-educated and qualified workers do not constitute a cost factor; they are primarily a capital asset in companies.

This view is the basis on which we have formulated our demands:

General Training and Education

European standards in the field of training and education have to be set for employees in the powered two-wheeler industry. Similarly, it is crucial that employees in manufacturing and the supply chain are able to rely on acquiring certain skills and knowledge. That is the only way employees can fully exploit the possibilities and flexibility Europe offers them.

With regard to the part of the industry covering services and repair:

Europe will become a more and more tight-knit community in the coming years. Vehicle safety is a major issue in all European countries. Only well-trained and qualified employees can guarantee vehicle safety requirements are met. There has to be minimum standards to guarantee safety not only for the customer, but also for the employees. Poor servicing should be avoided as it is damaging to a brand's image.

The service sector is primarily dominated by small and very small companies. Many of these companies are unable to provide training programmes for workers. In this regard, politicians could provide the means to develop a single, Europe-wide certification system in accordance with the respective national training and education systems. This would extend the range of career opportunities open to workers and increase the number of jobs in which their skills could be relevant. In addition, it would reinforce motorcycle safety and user safety on the roads.

University degrees

The motorcycle industry is transforming more and more into a high-tech industry, and as this transformation takes place, sector and cross-sector competencies required of employees increases.

In order to stay in line with the European mobility concepts, it is necessary when running a motorbike to cut down energy consumption, waste emissions and costs. Developments to this effect are already visible, the hybrid-bike being an example.

Course content in the context of bachelor studies has partly been brought into line at European level, but this must be developed further. Ever greater levels of interdisciplinary knowledge are necessary to be able to exist on future markets. Companies should not be left alone when it comes to providing training to obtain required knowledge.

The entry criteria for universities must be modified in the future. Skilled workers without university diplomas should be able to attend a university to study the field in which they are skilled.

Opening up university education would create a win-win situation on both sides: employees could increase their theoretical knowledge and skills and employers could

Brigitte Döth, IG Metall

benefit by maintaining the acquired theoretical knowledge and practical skills inhouse. In addition, this could serve to bolster innovation in a sector with a great deal of potential. Clearly, politicians must provide a political framework to facilitate this, but, first and foremost, a uniform framework for training and education within Europe is urgently required. Furthermore, companies promoting employee training and education should be supported.

Access criteria to European universities must be simplified and relaxed. In this respect we must ensure that university admittance is based on talent and motivation rather than on parents' income levels. Exclusion of skilled workers from the universities is a loss for the sector, especially considering the sector's growth potential.

Vocational Training

Training and education for workers should not stop once initial job-training is completed. Life-long learning should be the norm in the future.

The motorcycle industry is a constantly developing sector. Customers must be able to rely not only on the high-quality products of manufacturers and suppliers, but also on quality in the service sector. If the network of companies providing good services shrinks further, maintaining high standards will become an even more significant issue. Customers must be able to rely on this.

The economic crisis offers opportunities in terms of advanced training. Special emphasis must be placed on employees with low qualifications. Instead of job cuts as a solution during the crisis period, workers could be trained, thus improving their perspectives on the labour market. There is a clear need for a concept covering the long term with regards to training and education.

Working conditions for an ageing population

Workforces in companies in Europe, and above all in Western Europe, are becoming older. To obtain full pension entitlements in many European countries, workers have to stay longer in employment to avoid old age poverty.

This trend has to be taken into account when dealing with work organisation. Physical work has to be reduced to a minimum and it is crucial that occupational health and safety remains a permanent topic and not an issue addressed on an ad hoc basis. This is an issue which must be taken into account in all future projects.

Shift work should be avoided as far as possible and if it cannot be avoided it should be organised in accordance with latest available data from health and safety experts with special knowledge on shift work.

Not only the physical strain resulting from work has a negative effect on workers' health, higher performance targets constitute another factor detrimental to health. The "burnout

syndrome" in workers just over 40 years of age is becoming more and more frequent. This must be prevented. Workers must be able to complete a day's work without them having to work flat out over long periods; the workload must be commensurate with their physical abilities and not put their health in danger.

Furthermore, employers also have to accept that older employees also need to be qualified, which could prevent excess demand. Political decision-makers must recognise the fact that initial training and education is only the beginning of what should be a life-long process. Projected demographic change in society, including workers, is still not factored in to employees' approaches to training. To shore up jobs in the future, these points must be taken into account.

Sectoral development is moving towards greater use of high-tech production methods and materials. A goal for the sector should be to have it become a permanent element in the different future mobility concepts. To consolidate efforts to become a high-tech sector all employees have to be included in the process.

In an industry such as the powered two-wheeler one it is also important to guarantee the transfer of knowledge and experience from older employees to the younger generation of workers.

Avoiding precarious working conditions - No lowering of social standards

As workers' representatives we believe this topic is one of the most important.

Precarious working conditions have to be avoided. Even if business generated by the motorcycle industry falls into the seasonal business category in many areas, this cannot mean that the peaks are covered by agency workers and temporary employees.

Smart solutions have to be developed in this respect via, for example, HR management systems and staff development schemes (ongoing vocational training).

Conclusion

Employees in the sector are also its customers.

The scooter sector will become a permanent element in the various future mobility concepts, providing that European manufacturers meet the prerequisite, which is to consistently keep pace with the latest technical developments, and indeed push them forward.

The market segment for large-volume motorcycles falls primarily into the category of leisure vehicles and will continue to do so. The client base for large motorcycles is mainly composed of well-off individuals who purchase these vehicles as part of a hobby.

Competitiveness is measured in a companies' innovative capability, which can only be guaranteed with dedicated employees. Companies which do not see employees as contributors to company success and consider them to be a mere cost factor will lose their competitiveness in the future.

If political decision-makers do not ensure high social standards are maintained, and therefore do not provide a high level of education and training, our society will belong to the losers in the future.