

# **EFFICIENT TRAINING SYSTEM - A PRECONDITION FOR THE SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

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## **Summary**

The main aim of an efficient statistical system is the public trust, which can be ensured by a professional competence of the statistical office. It determines the need for a complex of activities to renew and perfect specialists' knowledge in the circumstances when on the one hand the public request for qualitative information increases and on the other hand the staff turnover is high.

The role of training in the statistical system is characterised. An important trend of development is the evaluation of training according to performance of professional functions; development trends of the organisation; the period of obtaining vocational education. The evaluation process of training is analysed.

New challenges for the statistical systems determine the necessity for well-planned and active staffing programmes, career development, education and training systems. The CSB of Latvia experience is evaluated.

A qualified personnel is the most significant factor in the setting up and functioning of an effective statistical system.

The aim of the paper is to characterise the training system in the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB), to discover the peculiarities of its development and mark the directions of further perfection.

## **1. A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PERSONNEL OF THE CSB OF LATVIA**

The state statistical system in Latvia is functionally centralised and territorially decentralised. The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, which is in the core of official statistical system, now reorganises its territorial structure in the direction of decreasing the number of regional statistical units, changing their functions and increasing the degree of centralisation.

The CSB staff is recruited on the basis of normative requirements worked out by the Civil Service Department of the Republic of Latvia. New employees are recruited on the basis of their compliance with the requirements in education and professional experience.

At the end of 2003 429 staff employees worked in the system of CSB, of which 301 – in the central office. Besides, 172 employees represented different long-time and short-time employees (price recorders, interviewers, translators, etc.), while 54 employees had the functions of technical personnel.

The staff employees of the CSB have a high level of education. Of 301 employees of the central office 218 (that is 72%) have higher education. Moreover, 25 of them have received a Master's degree, while 2 employees held the degree of the Doctor of Sciences. 18 employees

are pursuing a Master's degree, 2 are working on a Doctor's degree, 22 employees are studying in higher education institutions.

The staff of the CSB consists of civil servants and employees working on a contractual basis according to their functions and responsibilities. More than a half of the staff of the CSB is civil servants. The most part of the CSB's employees has obtained the higher education in the University of Latvia and Riga Technical University in the speciality of economics (of which part in statistics), mathematical statistics and informatics.

The percentage of personnel turnover in the period 2000-2003 at the central office of the CSB fluctuates from 7,1% - 8,9%. The highest percentage of the personnel turnover (including those who moved to other structural units of the CSB) was in the Department of Macroeconomic statistics (18,8%), Department of Social Statistics (18,2%) and in the Statistical Methodology and Organisation Division (23%). In the first half of 2004 the personnel turnover in comparison with the corresponding period of the previous year has increased twice. The most important reason for the rather high personnel turnover are the unsatisfied level of salaries (in the CSB it is even lower than average in the public sector, in which it is less than in the private sector) Employees recruited in a competition fill the vacancies and a large part of them are young people without practical experience. Higher education establishments ensure basic theoretical and practical skills but the statistical office has to undertake the training of practical methods in different levels. In such circumstances an efficient training system is one of the cornerstones of progressive statistics. It is necessary to found a system for resuming and enlarging of specialists' knowledge in the situation when on the one hand the public requirement for qualitative information increases and on the other hand the turnover of specialists in the branch of statistics is high.

## **2. PERSONNEL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY**

Statistics as a branch that offers products and services to the public during the last 10 years has radically changed. The Central Statistical Bureau is developed as a client orientated institution. These new conditions just determine new requirements for the specialists to perform their duties.

The main guideline of personnel policy as a part of integrated approach is set out in the CSB Strategy [2]:

The CSB wants to present itself as a high quality and knowledge-based institution in the country so the competence of the staff is the most important production factor, which will be achieved by:

- offering different ways of training, development and career broadening programmes;
- equality of opportunity;
- providing with a positive work environment.

In 2002 the CSB of Latvia with the help of specialists of Statistics Finland worked out the strategy "Human resources training and development policy"[1]. The task of the policy is to build learning opportunities for personnel in order the staff be able to perform the mission of the CSB – to provide domestic and foreign data users with timely, accurate, complete, easily comprehensible and internationally comparable statistical information on the economic, demographic, social and environmental phenomena and processes in Latvia.

Educated, skilled and innovative staff able to work creatively and independently in changing conditions is the objective of the Human resources training and development policy.

The State Civil Service Law of the Republic of Latvia gives a common framework to the personnel policy and the guidelines to the personnel administration and management. According to the qualification criteria of the law, the annual evaluation of the staff must be done.

The items of the training system of the CSB of Latvia and factors that determine it are:

- responsible for training organisation, planning, managing and following-up structural units and officials;
- the staff surveys allowing to obtain the wishes of employees for improving skills and knowledge in concrete domain;
- the annual evaluation of civil servants' performance (work), in which are reflected the training needs (necessary teaching subjects) for every official;
- the program of statistical works, which determines the necessity for specialists of concrete profession and concrete level of preparation;
- the possibilities and supply of domestic and international training organisations for teaching concrete subjects;
- financial resources, assigned for training needs.

Taking into account practical and financial considerations, international training courses and other staff development activities in foreign countries are planned and managed by other structural units and officials than the domestic training or in-country activities. The responsible unit for domestic training is the Personnel section (Head of section and senior expert), for international training - the EU Affairs Co-ordination division, for IT training – the Department of Informatics.

For programming the training activities and its optimisation, it is important to elaborate the strategy of statistical knowledge – programs of education for each area and for each class of specialists and forms of education. Since 2001 the annual evaluation of civil servants performance (work) are conducted in the CSB. The training plans set up for current year in the estimation of fulfilment of plans.

In 2002 in co-operation with Statistics Finland for the first time a staff survey – a wide-range inquiry of employees was arranged regarding their satisfaction degree with work, management, working atmosphere, development and training prospects, including the field, in which the staff wishes to perfect knowledge, motivation to attend teachings, possibility to get teachings, etc. The results of this survey are used for further planning of development and elimination of the existing drawbacks.

### **3. TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES TO PERSONNEL**

Different ways of training and development methods are introduced in the CSB in order to carry out the tasks and functions determined in the Law on State Statistics [5]. The following content areas are currently important in the statistical office:

- statistical method skills development;

- competent analysts preparation;
- professional skill development for IT specialists and IT training for statisticians;
- language skills development.
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The development and training opportunities must be available for staff at different levels at the CSB. The training opportunities are different according to two personnel groups: civil servants and other employees. Training opportunities of the CSB personnel according to training providers and activities are the following:

- the Latvian School of Public Administration;
- Training of European Statisticians courses;
- in-house (in-country) training courses;
- regional training courses;
- various training seminars and lectures;
- placements (stays);
- information technology (IT) training courses;
- statistical readings of Latvian Statistical Association (LSA);
- seminars for new employees (new comers).

The Civil Service Law states that civil servants should be provided with a possibility to improve their skills for not less than 45 days in three years. Such training the CSB's staff mainly realises in the Latvian School of Public Administration (LSPA) which implements the national policy for training of civil servants. The LSPA goal is to improve the knowledge and skills of employees in public administration, to prepare civil servants capable to work within the Latvian public administration in line with the Public Administration Concept and the EU requirements. The LSPA provides courses on different subject matters (EU studies, administrative process studies, training in IT, languages, etc.), also in statistics.

As mentioned before the possibility to train at the LSPA is widely used by the CSB. Thus in 2003, for example, 580 man-days were devoted there to obtain knowledge. Attendance of courses of foreign languages, project management and issues of the European Union was still the highest.

A large number of the CSB personnel have taken participation in the Training of European Statisticians (TES) courses, which till 2003 organised the TES Institute. During 1996-2003 119 employees of the CSB have attended TES courses. The courses cover current issues as well as basic knowledge of European statistics - modern practise and theory is combined, best practises are disseminated within the European Statistical System. The main goal – to fill existing gaps between the national training schemes and the challenges of the European Statistical System. Eurostat has the general management responsibilities for the training programmes and the TES Institute on a contractual basis was responsible for planning of each individual course.

TES courses contribute to national training schemes by addressing demands, which cannot be met nationally, gives access to international experts in relevant fields to share their knowledge and expertise, promotes co-operation and exchange of skills and experiences. The objectives of these courses can be defined in general as an important part in the approach to raise the quality of European statistics and important contribution to harmonisation, standardisation

and the comparability of European statistics. Participation in the TES courses was financed by PHARE and it was a very valuable investment in further development of our statistical system.

It should be mentioned as a positive moment that a state national statistical institution also is able to initiate training themes according to its interest. It enables a greater number of specialists to get acquainted with the experience of highly professional specialists in a concrete field of statistics. In June 2002 the first in-country course **Confidentiality and protection of privacy** was held in Latvia and gave a possibility for 16 employees of the CSB to participate.

In June 2003 the second in-country course **Introduction to the use of administrative sources for statistical purposes** was organised. 18 employees from the CSB and 6 persons from the Bank of Latvia, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economics took part in this course. The lecturers in these both courses were high-qualified specialists from Eurostat and other international organisations, which often were the teaching staff in the TES courses. The main opportunities of in-country courses - they give a possibility to participate for a large number of listeners as well as the economy of travelling costs.

In order to ensure the professional level of statisticians it is important to balance the maintenance of the level of knowledge of general theory and mastering of professional skills of a concrete field. The above mentioned training was in general orientated to specialised themes of branches. As a great number of employees in our office have obtained education and started their professional carrier in the circumstances of planned economy then in the necessary training programme was included the course **"General theory of statistics"** to refresh and increase the theoretical knowledge base.

In May 2004 the CSB of Latvia organised the third in-country course - the training course in statistics in the framework of Multi-beneficiary statistical co-operation programme. The purpose of the training course was to improve proficiency and skills in statistical methods (index numbers, survey sampling, time trends analysis, modelling and forecasting, statistical methods for quality improvement). The necessary requirement – ability to choose a proper statistical method according to empirical data and a problem to be solved, to interpret results and to draw conclusions, using a software MS Excel and SPSS.

The University of Latvia won the tender on the rights to carry out the training course due to large experience of the organisation in the relevant field, high quality of the offered course description, high level of qualification and general and specific professional experience of training staff (all 5 lecturers are Dr.habil.oec. or Dr.oec. and professors or associated professors), as well as lower costs.

The theoretical session of the training course (4 days) was held in the premises of the CSB of Latvia, the practical classes (computer applications, one day) in the computer laboratory of the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Latvia. The course was attended by 23 participants from different structural units of the CSB.

The course materials were distributed in advance before starting course, lecturers discussed theory and various methods of calculating statistical indices, their practical application and interpretation.

The participants' feedback showed that they (80%) were very satisfied or satisfied with lecturers' performance. Half of the participants noted that the course was well organised and presentations were interesting. The listeners gave recommendations for further improvements of the course concerning its content, sequence and running. In the opinion of some participants in the future more attention could be paid to sample surveys, graphic presentations, particularly by practical examples, statistical methods of quality assurance, practical application of statistical data analyses. The participants stressed that group work could be introduced during classes, allowing more discussion and debate on the use of different statistical methods.

The staff of CSB is taking part in various training seminars and lectures on different subject matters provided in the CSB and other institutions in accordance with international co-operation projects and domestic plans.

In 1997-2004 12 employees from the CSB have participated in 5,5 months placements at Eurostat bureau in order to raise their qualification, one - in OECD, one - in Statistics Finland. Seven employees had an opportunity to study in-depth the theory and methodology of sample surveys at the Umea University in Sweden.

In 1998 intensive training of the CSB employees in IT issues started. In the previous period, the training of staff was conducted individually and in small groups. In 1998, a competition was announced on PHARE budget, which envisaged training of statisticians and IT staff for the work with modern data processing equipment and application methods. By means of PHARE resources, a modern IT training room with 10 places was developed and equipped in the CSB building. As a result of competition, in 1998 and 1999 a company **Computerland Training Centre** was selected and 415 employees were trained in 42 groups, employees of regional offices included.

From the point of view of subject, the greatest number of employees (statisticians) was trained in application of MS Office products including MS Windows, MS Word, MS Excel, MS Access, MS Power Point, MS Project, Internet and SPSS. The training was organised in three levels: for beginners, users and professionals.

The training of IT staff was organised in separate groups according to a special program involving following subject groups: System Analysis Basic, Data Base Design, Visual Basic, SQL Programming Language.

In relation to the introduction of the new integrated statistical data management system (ISDMS) of the new metadata driven data processing system in 2001, a wide-range training of statisticians was started in two levels: statistician-ISDMS user (data entry and analysis) and statistician-developer (preparation, description and system generation of metadata of statistical surveys).

For the consultations of employees in IT issues, a special system of questions and responses making use of the Lotus Notes system was developed and is in operation.

The training of the CSB employees is ensured both by using its own specialists and by using various teaching opportunities in other institutions, as well as inviting guest lecturers.

Thus in 2003, for example, the CSB specialists ensured on-site training in different urgent issues:

- a seminar for the new CSB specialists where heads of organisational units presented the tasks, development plans of departments and sections was organised;
- to improve knowledge of employees in different issues of information science, the following training courses were organised at the CSB:
  - work in ISDMS environment (data analysis, aggregations, summaries, MS Excel use in data analysis, OLAP usage, use of the Register of Enterprises);
  - work with applications developed in LOTUS environment and use of e-mail;
  - work with MS ACCESS.
- training seminar of interviewers;
- seminar of price recorders;
- training of employees of the newly developed information centres.

Many employees of the CSB of Latvia are the members of Latvian Statistical Association (LSA), one of activities of which are the statistical readings. Since the beginning of these presentations at the end of 2000 25 lecturers on various issues of the statistical theory and practise have been delivered. In 2002 discussions on statistics – related issues were initiated. This new form of statistical readings is particularly popular among participants. The employees of the CSB of Latvia take active participation in the LSA's statistical readings as listeners, as well as lecturers and discussants. In the future perspective it is also necessary further to support and to develop this form of LSA's activity including in the themes of presentations (discussions) more aspects of the statistical theory, methodology and terminology. This year it is planned for the first time to invite as a lecturer the foreign professor-researcher.

Main directions of further development of the training system in the CSB of Latvia are the following:

- strengthening the role of planning and following-up functions in the training system;
- increasing attention to training of methods and skills of statistical and economical analyse;
- introduction of methods of competence analysis (evaluation);
- perfection of the managing of training process of employees, which are not the civil servants;
- creation of a data base of all the CSB personal containing the information on basic qualification (general and special), training needs in concrete subject, the plans (subjects and terms) of teaching and fulfilment of plans;
- improving the significance of in-country training courses by inviting foreign lecturers and specialists.

## References

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## List of Abbreviations

CSB - Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

IT - Information technology

LSPA - Latvian School of Public Administration

LSA - Latvian Statistical Association

TES - Training of European Statisticians

ISMDS - Integrated statistical data management system