

Press release

The Hague, 21st April 2006

Knowledge level employees main competitive advantage

One out of fifteen employees experiences great difficulty with reading and writing

Few employers are aware that low literacy can also occur within their company. The strong emphasis in our society on knowledge and its acquisition makes it necessary to have sufficient command of reading and writing skills. Not only because low literacy hinders people while functioning in daily life and work, but also because the knowledge economy requires increasingly better-trained employees.

This becomes clear in a research, commissioned by Stichting Lezen & Schrijven. The report 'Laaggeletterd in het werk' (Low literate at work) was presented today by H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, chairwoman of the foundation to the Daily board of the Social-Economic Council. The research was conducted by TNO (Dutch central organisation for Applied Natural-scientific Research). It is the first time that insight is provided into the extent of the problem of low literacy on the work floor.

By means of seven professions, researchers have studied which reading, writing and arithmetic tasks lower trained employees have to perform. And which tasks or changes therein form the biggest problem for low-literate persons. The research shows which levels of literacy are required of for instance cleaning staff, security guards or sales employees.

Some 6% of the employees in our country cannot or only with great difficulty read and write. Technological developments in the coming five to ten years, but also higher demands made by customers, will have major consequences for the researched professions. Knowledge level and skills should therefore be elevated. If this would not happen, the amount of employees seriously hindered in their position, would rise to 30% of the professional population.

Because of the development towards a knowledge society, companies should have more attention for competitive strength, they should innovate more. The knowledge level of their employees is an important advantage in this context. As a result, low trained employees should also receive additional training, ensuring them to keep up with developments to have a wider application scope. "Our mutual ambition is to construct a strong, social and durable economy. This ambition is seriously threatened by 1.5 million people who cannot keep up due to a lack of reading and writing skills," Princess Laurentien said while presenting the report.

Note for the editors, not for publication:

For more information, please contact Margreet de Vries, director Stichting Lezen & Schrijven, phone: [REDACTED]

The report 'Laaggeletterd in het werk' can be applied for via www.lezenenschrijven.nl.