

Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE)

Opinion no 4 of the Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE) to the attention of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on appropriate initial and in-service training for judges at national and European levels

Introduction

1. At a time when we are witnessing an increasing attention being paid to the role and significance of the judiciary, which is seen as the ultimate guarantor of the democratic functioning of institutions at national, European and international levels, the question of the training of prospective judges before they take up their posts and of in-service training is of particular importance (see Opinion of the CCJE N° 1 (2001), paragraphs 10-13 and Opinion N° 3 (2002), paragraphs 25 and 50.ix).
2. The independence of the judiciary confers rights on judges of all levels and jurisdictions, but also imposes ethical duties. The latter include the duty to perform judicial work professionally and diligently, which implies that they should have great professional ability, acquired, maintained and enhanced by the training which they have a duty, as well as a right, to undergo.
3. It is essential that judges, selected after having done full legal studies, receive detailed, in-depth, diversified training so that they are able to perform their duties satisfactorily.
4. Such training is also a guarantee of their independence and impartiality, in accordance with the requirements of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
5. Lastly, training is a prerequisite if the judiciary is to be respected and worthy of respect. The trust citizens place in the judicial system will be strengthened if judges have a depth and diversity of knowledge which extend beyond the technical field of law to areas of important social concern, as well as courtroom and personal skills and understanding enabling them to manage cases and deal with all persons involved appropriately and sensitively. Training is in short essential for the objective, impartial and competent performance of judicial functions, and to protect judges from inappropriate influences.
6. There are great differences among European countries with respect to the initial and in-service training of judges. These differences can in part be related to particular features of the different judicial systems, but in some respects do not seem to be inevitable or necessary. Some countries offer lengthy formal training in specialised establishments, followed by intensive further training. Others provide a sort of apprenticeship under the supervision of an experienced judge, who imparts knowledge and professional advice on the basis of concrete examples, showing what approach to take and avoiding any kind of didacticism. Common law countries rely heavily on a lengthy professional experience, commonly as advocates. Between these possibilities, there is a whole range of countries where training is to varying degrees organised and compulsory.
7. Regardless of the diversity of national institutional systems and the problems arising in certain countries, training should be seen as essential in view of the need to improve not only the skills of those in the judicial public service but also the very functioning of that service.
8. The importance of the training of judges is recognised in international instruments such as the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, adopted in 1985, and Council of Europe texts adopted in 1994 (Recommendation N° R (94) 12 on the independence, efficiency and role of judges) and 1998 (European Charter on the Statute for Judges) and was referred to in paragraph 11 of the CCJE's Opinion N° 1.

I. The right to training and the legal level at which this right should be guaranteed

9. Constitutional principles should guarantee the independence and impartiality on which the legitimacy of judges depends, and judges for their part should ensure that they maintain a high degree of professional competence (see paragraph 50 (ix) of the CCJE Opinion N° 3).
10. In many countries the training of judges is governed by special regulations. The essential point is to include the need for training in the rules governing the status of judges; legal regulations should not detail the precise content of training, but entrust this task to a special body responsible for drawing up the curriculum, providing the training and supervising its provision.
11. The State has a duty to provide the judiciary or other independent body responsible for organising and supervising training with the necessary means, and to meet the costs incurred by judges and others involved.
12. The CCJE therefore recommends that, in each country, the legislation on the status of judges should provide for the training of judges.

II. The authority responsible for training

13. The European Charter on the Statute for Judges (paragraph 2.3) states that any authority responsible for supervising the quality of the training programme should be independent of the Executive and the Legislature and that at least half its members should be judges. The Explanatory Memorandum also indicates that the training of judges should not be limited to technical legal training, but should also take into account that the nature of the judicial office often requires the judge to intervene in complex and difficult situations.

14. This highlights the key importance attaching to the independence and composition of the authority responsible for training and its content. This is a corollary of the general principle of judicial independence.

15. Training is a matter of public interest, and the independence of the authority responsible for drawing up syllabuses and deciding what training should be provided must be preserved.

16. The judiciary should play a major role in or itself be responsible for organising and supervising training. Accordingly, and in keeping with the recommendations of the European Charter on the Statute for Judges, the CCJE advocates that these responsibilities should, in each country, be entrusted, not to the Ministry of Justice or any other authority answerable to the Legislature or the Executive, but to the judiciary itself or another independent body (including a Judicial Service Commission). Judges' associations can also play a valuable role in encouraging and facilitating training, working in conjunction with the judicial or other body which has direct responsibility.

17. In order to ensure a proper separation of roles, the same authority should not be directly responsible for both training and disciplining judges. The CCJE therefore recommends that, under the authority of the judiciary or other independent body, training should be entrusted to a special autonomous establishment with its own budget, which is thus able, in consultation with judges, to devise training programmes and ensure their implementation.

18. Those responsible for training should not also be **directly** responsible for appointing or promoting judges. If the body (i.e. a judicial service commission) **referred to in the CCJE's Opinion N° 1, paragraphs 73 (3), 37, and 45**, is competent for training and appointment or promotion, a clear separation should be provided between its branches responsible for these tasks.

19. In order to shield the establishment from inappropriate outside influence, the CCJE recommends that the managerial staff and trainers of the establishment should be appointed by the judiciary or other independent body responsible for organising and supervising training.

20. It is important that the training is carried out by judges and by experts in each discipline. Trainers should be chosen from among the best in their profession and carefully selected by the body responsible for training, taking into account their knowledge of the subjects being taught and their teaching skills.

21. When judges are in charge of training activities, it is important that these judges preserve contact with court practice.

22. Training methods should be determined and reviewed by the training authority, and there should be regular meetings for trainers to enable them to share their experiences and enhance their approach.

III. Initial training

a. Should training be mandatory?

23. While it is obvious that judges who are recruited at the start of their professional career need to be trained, the question arises whether this is necessary where judges are selected from among the best lawyers, who are experienced, as (for instance) in Common Law countries.

24. In the CCJE's opinion, both groups should receive initial training: the performance of judicial duties is a new profession for both, and involves a particular approach in many areas, notably with respect to the professional ethics of judges, procedure, and relations with all persons involved in court proceedings.

25. On the other hand, it is important to take the specific features of recruitment methods into account so as to target and adapt the training programmes appropriately: experienced lawyers need to be trained only in what is required for their new profession. In some small countries with a very small judiciary, local training opportunities may be more limited and informal, but such countries in particular may benefit from shared training opportunities with other countries.

26. The CCJE therefore recommends mandatory initial training by programmes appropriate to appointees' professional experience.

b. The initial training programme

27. The initial training syllabus and the intensiveness of the training will differ greatly according to the chosen method of recruiting judges. Training should not consist only of instruction in the techniques involved in the handling of cases by judges, but should also take into consideration the need for social awareness and an extensive understanding of different subjects reflecting the complexity of life in society. In addition, the opening up of borders means that future judges need to be aware that they are European judges and be more aware of European issues.

28. In view of the diversity of the systems for training judges in Europe, the CCJE recommends:

- i. that all appointees to judicial posts should have or acquire, before they take up their duties, extensive knowledge of substantive national and international law and procedure;
- ii. that training programmes more specific to the exercise of the profession of judge should be decided on by the establishment responsible for training, and by the trainers and judges themselves;
- iii. that these theoretical and practical programmes should not be limited to techniques in the purely legal fields but should also include training in ethics and an introduction to other fields relevant to judicial activity, such as management of cases and administration of courts, information technology, foreign languages, social sciences and alternative dispute resolution (ADR);
- iv. that the training should be pluralist in order to guarantee and strengthen the open-mindedness of the judge;
- v. that, depending upon the existence and length of previous professional experience, training should be of significant length in order to avoid its being purely a matter of form.

29. The CCJE recommends the practice of providing for a period of training common to the various legal and judicial professions (for instance, lawyers and prosecutors in countries where they perform duties separate from those of judges). This practice is likely to foster better knowledge and reciprocal understanding between judges and other professions.

30. The CCJE has also noted that many countries make access to judicial posts conditional upon prior professional experience. While it does not seem possible to impose such a model everywhere, and while the adoption of a system combining various types of recruitment may also have the advantage of diversifying judges' backgrounds, it is important that the period of initial training should include, in the case of candidates who have come straight from university, substantial training periods in a professional environment (lawyers' practices, companies, etc).

IV. In-service training

31. Quite apart from the basic knowledge they need to acquire before they take up their posts, judges are "condemned to perpetual study and learning" (see report of R. Jansen "How to prepare judges to become well-qualified judges in 2003", doc. CCJE-GT (2003) 3).

32. Such training is made indispensable not only by changes in the law, technology and the knowledge required to perform judicial duties but also by the possibility in many countries that judges will acquire new responsibilities when they take up new posts. In-service programmes should therefore offer the possibility of training in the event of career changes, such as a move between criminal and civil courts; the assumption of specialist jurisdiction (e.g. in a family, juvenile or social court) and the assumption of a post such as the presidency of a chamber or court. Such a move or the assumption of such a responsibility may be made conditional upon attendance on a relevant training programme.

33. While it is essential to organise in-service training, since society has the right to benefit from a well trained judge, it is also necessary to disseminate a culture of training in the judiciary.

34. It is unrealistic to make in-service training mandatory in every case. The fear is that it would then become bureaucratic and simply a matter of form. The suggested training must be attractive enough to induce judges to take part in it, as participation on a voluntary basis is the best guarantee for the effectiveness of the training. This should also be facilitated by ensuring that every judge is conscious that there is an ethical duty to maintain and update his or her knowledge.

35. The CCJE also encourages in the context of continuous training collaboration with other legal professional bodies responsible for continuous training in relation to matters of common interest (e.g. new legislation).

36. It further stresses the desirability of arranging continuous judicial training in a way which embraces all levels of the judiciary. Whenever feasible, the different levels should all be represented at the same sessions, giving the opportunity for exchange of views between them. This assists to break-down hierarchical tendencies, keeps all levels of the judiciary informed of each other's problems and concerns, and promotes a more cohesive and consistent approach throughout the judiciary.

37. The CCJE therefore recommends:

- i. that the in-service training should normally be based on the voluntary participation of judges;
- ii. that there may be mandatory in-service training only in exceptional cases; examples might (if the judicial or other body responsible so decided) include when a judge takes up a new post or a different type of work or functions or in the event of fundamental changes in legislation;
- iii. that training programmes should be drawn up under the authority of the judicial or other body responsible for initial and in-service training and by trainers and judges themselves;
- iv. that those programmes, implemented under the same authority, should focus on legal and other issues relating to the functions performed by judges and correspond to their needs (see paragraph 27 above);
- v. that the courts themselves should encourage their members to attend in-service training courses;
- vi. that the programmes should take place in and encourage an environment, in which members of different branches and levels of the judiciary may meet and exchange their experiences and achieve common insights;
- vii. that, while training is an ethical duty for judges, member states also have a duty to make available to judges the financial resources, time and other means necessary for in-service training.

V. Assessment of training

38. In order continuously to improve the quality of judicial training, the organs responsible for training should conduct frequent assessments of programmes and methods. An important role in this process should be played by opinions expressed by all participants to training initiatives, which may be encouraged through appropriate means (answers to questionnaires, interviews).

39. While there is no doubt that performance of trainers should be monitored, the evaluation of the performance of participants in judicial training initiatives is more questionable. The in-service training of judges may be truly fruitful if their free interaction is not influenced by career considerations.

40. In countries that train judges at the start of their professional career, the CCJE considers evaluation of the results of initial training to be necessary in order to ensure the best appointments to the judiciary. In contrast, in countries that choose judges from the ranks of experienced lawyers, objective evaluation methods are applied before appointment, with training occurring only after candidates have been selected, so that in those countries evaluation during initial training is not appropriate.

41. It is nevertheless important, in the case of candidates subject to an appraisal, that they should enjoy legal safeguards that protect them against arbitrariness in the appraisal of their work. In addition, in the case of States arranging for the provisional appointment of judges, the removal of these from office at the end of the training period should take place with due regard for the safeguards applicable to judges when their removal from office is envisaged.

42. In view of the above, the CCJE recommends:

- i. that training programmes and methods should be subject to frequent assessments by the organs responsible for judicial training;
- ii. that, in principle, participation in judges' training initiatives should not be subject to qualitative assessment; their participation in itself, objectively considered, may however be taken into account for professional evaluation of judges;
- iii. that quality of performance of trainees should nonetheless be evaluated, if such evaluation is made necessary by the fact that, in some systems, initial training is a phase of the recruitment process.

VI. The European training of judges

43. Whatever the nature of their duties, no judge can ignore European law, be it the European Convention on Human Rights or other Council of Europe Conventions, or if appropriate, the Treaty of the European Union and the legislation deriving from it, because they are required to apply it directly to the cases that come before them.

44. In order to promote this essential facet of judges' duties, the CCJE considers that member states, after strengthening the study of European law in universities, should also promote its inclusion in the initial and in-service training programmes proposed for judges, with particular reference to its practical applications in day-to-day work.

45. It also recommends reinforcing the European network for the exchange of information between persons and entities in charge of the training of judges (Lisbon Network), which promotes training on matters of common interest and comparative law, and that this training should cater for trainers as well as the judges themselves. The functioning of this Network can be effective only if every member state supports it, notably by establishing a body responsible for the training of judges, as set out in section II above, and by pan-European co-operation in this field.

46. Furthermore, the CCJE considers that the co-operation within other initiatives aiming at bringing together the judicial training institutions in Europe, in particular within the European Judicial Training Network, can effectively contribute to the greater coordination and harmonisation of the programmes and the methods of training of judges on the whole continent.