

Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning

(2008/C 140/09)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Whereas:

- (1) The Spring 2000 Lisbon European Council conclusions⁽¹⁾ called for Europe's education and training systems to be modernised in response to the demands of a knowledge-based economy and the increasing socio-economic and demographic challenges confronting the Union in a globalised world.
 - (2) The Spring 2002 Barcelona European Council conclusions⁽²⁾ urged Member States to ensure that all citizens are equipped with basic qualifications, as well as to increase opportunities for older workers to remain in the labour market, in particular by guaranteeing real access to lifelong learning.
 - (3) The Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning⁽³⁾ stressed that lifelong learning must cover learning from the pre-school age to that of post-retirement, including the entire spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning.
 - (4) The Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training⁽⁴⁾ noted that the adaptability and employability of adults, including older workers, depend strongly on opportunities to update and acquire new skills throughout working life.
 - (5) The Council Resolution of 28 May 2004 on strengthening policies, systems and practices in the field of guidance⁽⁵⁾ stressed that all European citizens should have access to guidance services at all life stages, paying particular attention to individuals and groups at risk.
 - (6) The Council conclusions of 28 May 2004 on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning⁽⁶⁾, as established in response to the November 2002 Copenhagen Declaration, called for the development and dissemination of European instruments to recognise non-formal and informal learning.
 - (7) The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning⁽⁷⁾ is aimed *inter alia* at ensuring that adults are able to develop and update their skills throughout their lives and that appropriate infrastructure is in place for the continuing education and training of adults.
 - (8) The Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks in education and training⁽⁸⁾ called for the development of indicators on adult skills to be pursued.
 - (9) The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework⁽⁹⁾ promotes an approach to the description of qualifications based on learning outcomes, regardless of how or where these are achieved.
 - (10) The 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme stresses that the low level of participation in adult learning of older workers and the low-skilled remains a major problem.
 - (11) The European Parliament Resolution of 16 January 2008 on adult learning: *It is never too late to learn*⁽¹⁰⁾ urges Member States to promote the acquisition of knowledge and to develop a culture of lifelong learning, notably by implementing gender equal policies designed to make adult education more attractive, more accessible and more effective,
- WELCOMES the October 2006 Commission communication: *It is never too late to learn*⁽¹¹⁾ and the September 2007 Commission Action Plan — *It is always a good time to learn*⁽¹²⁾, both of which highlight the importance of adult learning as a key component of lifelong learning and call on Member States to remove barriers to participation, to increase overall quality and efficiency in adult learning, to speed up the process of validation and recognition and to ensure sufficient investment in and monitoring of the field.

⁽¹⁾ Doc. SN 100/00 REV 1.

⁽²⁾ Doc. SN 100/02 REV 1, paragraphs 32 and 33.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 2.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 13, 18.1.2003, p. 2.

⁽⁵⁾ Doc. 9286/04.

⁽⁶⁾ Doc. 9600/04.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 311, 21.12.2007, p. 13.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ reference to be supplied.

⁽¹⁰⁾ (2007/2114 (INI)) — P6_TA-PROV(2008)0013.

⁽¹¹⁾ Doc. 14600/06 — COM(2006) 614 final.

⁽¹²⁾ Doc. 13426/07 — COM(2007) 558 final.

RECOGNISES the key role which adult learning can play in meeting the goals of the Lisbon Strategy, by fostering social cohesion, providing citizens with the skills required to find new jobs and helping Europe to better respond to the challenges of globalisation. In particular, there is a need to:

1. raise the skills levels of a still significant number of low-skilled workers, with a view to enabling all citizens to adapt to technological change and future skills needs and thereby contributing to improving overall economic performance;
2. address the problem of the persistently high number of early school leavers by offering a second chance to those who enter adult age without a qualification, focusing on areas of particular concern, such as basic literacy and numeracy, IT skills and language learning;
3. combat social exclusion due to circumstances such as low levels of initial education, unemployment and rural isolation, whilst paying more attention — in the face of current demographic and migration trends — to the lifelong learning and training requirements of older workers and migrants;
4. ensure the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of adult learning, with the aim of increasing active participation in such learning, especially among disadvantaged groups, of attracting sufficient public and private investment to this area, and of encouraging the private sector to consider such learning as a key component of workplace and business development.

CONSIDERS that adult learning can make an important contribution to meeting such needs by providing not only economic and social benefits, such as greater employability, access to better-quality jobs, more responsible citizenship and increased civic participation, but also individual benefits such as greater self-fulfilment, improved health and well-being and enhanced self-esteem, and accordingly that:

1. adult learning should be given stronger emphasis and more effective support at national level, as part of overall efforts to develop a culture of lifelong learning;
2. the specific measures detailed in the Annex to these conclusions could form a coherent framework for future action in

this field within the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme;

3. further development and implementation of such measures should fully respect the responsibility of Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education and training systems, and should use the open method of coordination;
4. progress and monitoring of adult learning should be consistent with the coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks adopted by the Council in May 2007 and be included in future joint progress reports on the 'Education and Training' work programme;
5. the cross-sectoral nature, diversity, complexity and richness of adult learning impose the need for an integrated approach involving all stakeholders, including those at local and regional level, the social partners and NGOs.

Accordingly INVITES THE MEMBER STATES to address the issues relating to adult learning identified in these conclusions, in particular by implementing the measures outlined in the Annex hereto in accordance with the specific context and priorities of the Member States,

and INVITES THE COMMISSION to:

- support Member States in further developing and improving adult learning in terms not only of increased opportunities, broader access and greater participation, but also of more relevant, results-oriented learning outcomes, using measures such as those outlined in the Annex to these conclusions,
- ensure complementarity and coherence between the follow-up given to any such measures and implementation of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, insofar as these relate to adult learners,
- strengthen and use existing research structures for the needs of adult education,
- pursue and intensify cooperation with the international organisations and relevant non-governmental bodies working in this field, as well as establish links with regional initiatives such as Europe-Asia cooperation and worldwide initiatives such as 'Education for All' and the Millennium Development Goals.

ANNEX

SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR THE PERIOD 2008-2010

A. BY THE COMMISSION, WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE MEMBER STATES

1. Analyse reforms in education and training at national level, especially the development of national qualifications systems in relation to the European Qualifications Framework and credit transfer systems relating to both formal, non-formal and informal learning, with a view to improving adult access to qualifications systems.
2. Analyse the impact of national education and training reforms in terms of the distribution of funding resources across the various age groups, in line with a lifelong learning approach.
3. Support the development of career opportunities, conditions and resources — based on existing good practice in the Member States — for those working in the field of adult learning, in order to enhance the visibility and status of the profession.
4. Carry out further research on the development of quality criteria for adult learning providers.
5. Draw up a common inventory of good practice and projects aimed at motivating those groups which are particularly hard to reach, identifying key factors for their reintegration into the labour market and society, and enhancing their self-esteem.
6. Identify good practice in the assessment of learning outcomes, particularly those of low-skilled and older workers and of migrants acquired mainly outside the formal learning system.
7. Produce a glossary of agreed definitions used in adult learning and, drawing on existing data collections, including those of the OECD, and remaining consistent with the 2008 Regulation on statistics on education and lifelong learning ⁽¹⁾, establish a set of European level comparable core data required to facilitate monitoring (The right of participation of all Member States in this work should be ensured).
8. Support measures to strengthen the place of adult learning within the context of national lifelong learning strategies.
9. Support campaigns aimed at raising awareness and motivation among potential learners and thereby increasing overall participation in adult learning.

B. BY THE MEMBER STATES, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Promote and support the exchange of good practice, mutual learning and the development of joint projects in the adult education field between stakeholders in the Member States.
2. As part of the drive towards developing a culture of lifelong learning, closely cooperate in identifying and removing barriers to adult learning, and in establishing demand-driven, high quality provision and facilities for the adult learning field, including e-Learning and distance learning opportunities.
3. Encourage both higher education and vocational education institutions to reach out more to adult learners, as well as develop partnerships with the business community in order to motivate employers to organise, and employees to engage in, adult learning in the workplace.
4. Work towards the objective of facilitating access to and increasing participation in adult learning by all citizens, in particular those who leave initial education and training early and would like a 'second chance', those with special needs and those with insufficient basic skills or low educational achievements, with the aim of encouraging them to upgrade their qualifications.
5. Ensure effective and efficient use of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the European Structural Funds and other similar sources of funding, in order to improve the delivery of learning opportunities for adults.

⁽¹⁾ Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning — Doc. PE-CONS 3659/3/07 REV 3. OJ reference to be supplied.

6. Promote the development and use of lifelong guidance systems which can provide adults with independent information and advice, individual skills analysis and personalised careers guidance.
 7. Consider — from a cost/benefit point of view — the contribution of adult learning to social cohesion and economic development.
 8. Facilitate the development of methodologies and tools needed to assess key skills and competencies — including those acquired mainly outside the formal learning system — and have them validated and defined in terms of learning outcomes, whilst investing in the promotion of validation and recognition procedures.
 9. Endeavour to ensure an adequate share for adult learning when allocating financial resources across the various educational sectors, in line with a lifelong learning approach.
 10. Promote the active involvement of the social partners and other stakeholders, including NGOs, in securing high quality learning provision tailored to the needs of the various categories of learners. Special emphasis should be placed on ICT learning approaches and the development of ICT skills.
 11. Reinforce cooperation with Cedefop and the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning, as well as make full use of the research capacities of other international institutions, in the area of adult education and learning.
 12. Based on the results obtained after implementation of these measures, consider further possible action beyond 2010 in accordance with the follow up to the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme.
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