

## 1. Introduction – Welcome to Denmark

- Good morning – Dear ASEM Life Long Learning hub members, Distinguished guest, Ambassadors of ASEM countries, speakers and participants
- Distinguished guests – ladies and gentlemen
- It is a privilege and an honour for me to open the ASEM Forum for Lifelong Learning.
- And it is also a pleasure to welcome all our honoured guests to Denmark and our beautiful capital Copenhagen.

## 2. The Significance of Lifelong Learning (LLL)

- Labour markets have become increasingly dynamic and economies are increasingly globally integrated.
- Forecasting the competence needs in the labour market are uncertain and the only thing we can rely on is change.
- Many – predominantly low skilled – are at risk of losing their jobs, endangering the wellbeing of them, their families and of society at large. But we also see how many routine jobs – even high end with respect to qualifications – are phased out and leaving a new type of educated workers behind.
- But by changes in production, trade and logistics – capitalising new technologies and new modalities of work open new opportunities.
- In turn of the close down of traditional jobs new opportunities occur.
- Redundant workers cannot be allocated to the new job slots without the skills and competencies in demand by the new labour market.
- It is important that initial education prepares children and young people to the life of an ever changing world – they must have good foundation skills but even as important they must have trust in their own abilities, eagerness to acquire and use new skills and to cooperate in and accommodate to socially and ethnic heterogeneous social settings.

- An efficient and dynamic lifelong learning system will be a precondition for a dynamic and competitive labour market with a socially sustainable profile and opportunities for all.
- Societies who realize this and respond by investing in efficient LLL systems and invite business and industry to foster work placed learning will benefit hugely
- Let me give you an example of the benefits of LLL. A few years ago a sugar factory (Assens) in one of the Danish islands decided to automate the production and they would have to let most of their workers go.
- A responsible management, responsive unions and dynamic local adult training centres joined together in due time to avoid disaster. Together they provided individual training programmes for the workers well in advance to the closing down of their jobs.
- By the end of the process, the unemployment rate in the area was unchanged.
- Even though it is not always possible to find ways for everybody, this is somehow a blueprint to renewal in the Danish labour market. And we must go further down that road.

### 3. What are the Policy Challenges and How Can Research Contribute

- In this country, we build on a long standing tradition for lifelong learning and by large we have many of the structures and procedures needed for an efficient LLL system in place. I believe it is fair to say that many countries could learn from our experiences.
- But by the end of the day, relevance is the crucial criteria. This is where the big challenges lie.
- The programmes must constantly be renewed in response to changes in the labour market and those who make a use of the programmes – the learners – must feel that the education opportunity is relevant for them. They must be motivated to take part in the ongoing learning.
- This does not only relate to unemployed. It would be far better to enrol people before they have lost their jobs.
- So our challenge is twofold – we must build capacities to cope with change and we must build incentives to utilize the potentials.

- People, companies and unions must engage in relevant pre-emptive action in terms of setting up learning opportunities related to the implementation of new innovative technologies in the companies.
- In order to do this, we need to know more.
- We know that people learn even though they are not in a formal learning situation.
- And we know that there is a gap between their qualifications in terms of certificates and what they can really do.
- Often their competencies are much stronger than their ‘papers’ indicate and often people struggle even though they have basic skills issues that could be easily remedied.
- So we need to draw up a profile of the real competencies of the adult population in our nations. And we need to know more about how informal and non-formal learning works.
- We must look deeper into the potentials of work based learning experiences.
- We must know what drives people in various cultural segments of the population to learning and how to avoid de-motivation.
- I know that these topics are at heart of the work that you are doing and I will strongly encourage you to keep up the spirit and make an enhanced effort to bring the evidence that you produce to public knowledge.
- It is indeed important that this agenda is maintained in the ASEM Education Process. And those of you who participate in the upcoming senior officials meeting are in particular encouraged to stress this view in the process.
- We have noted that involving business and industry in education is on the agenda of the ASEM Education Process. But we have also noted that this can be understood as involving business and industry only in universities.
- From a Danish perspective this scope is too narrow when it comes to strategic rethinking of what education can and should do bring to our societies. This is relevant at all levels of education.

#### 4. What is the Scope for the ASEM Education Process

- We have learned that the answer to many of our challenges is education, education and even more education. That might very well be true.

- We need children at all ages to be independently thinking and innovative entrepreneurs, as well as dedicated learners.
- We need a far more dynamic interface between the education system the civil society and the labour market. So that young people from an early age can experience themselves as members of value adding community and alternate between work and learning.
- This is the way to take the notion of Lifelong Learning seriously.
- We must also be aware that other international settings for the international cooperation on education policies are active in the domain.
- And we should also take their achievements into account.
- First of all, we should not reinvent the wheel by repetition of what has already been done by others and secondly – important inspiration might be gathered.
- The OECD has launched a skills strategy. It is a combination of existing data, analysis and policy recommendations. We are eager to look deeper into this.
- Based on our experiences with OECD work, I assume that the paper will be a good point of departure also for your further studies.
- Like the well known PISA – PIAAC - Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies - provides a rich source of data on the competence profile in the participating nations.
- Nations, regions and clusters of nations sharing mutual interests in this matter will have access to the data and be able to undertake in-depth studies.
- I will strongly encourage the ASEM LLL hub to take note of these two major contributions and include them in your work.

## 5. Pride in the Past - Faith in the Future.

- Denmark can take pride in being the first nation to take LLL to the agenda in the ASEM context. It happened as soon as in 1999.
- I would also like at this stage to note that under the ASEM umbrella it has been possible to set up extremely beneficial bilateral cooperation.
- Today, we have a well established cooperation with Korea and Vietnam. And we are looking forward to taking this even further.

- In the ASEMME6 in Seoul, Korea next year, we are in particular looking forward to the presentation of the outcome of the ongoing work of the ASEM LLL hub as well as the contributions from the conference that we will open in a few minutes.

## 6. Acknowledgements

- I would like to express my gratitude to all who made this event possible.
- Our co-sponsors –
  - The Asia Europe Foundation.
  - The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Aarhus University and the chairmanship of the ASEM LLL hub that carried the heavy load of all logistics.
- And not the least – all of you who made your long way across continents to be with us today.
- I wish you all a pleasant stay in Denmark and in Copenhagen.
- But first and foremost I hope that you will enjoy the good spirit of hard work and cooperation with single-minded, dedicated and diligent colleagues.
- Good luck and thank you for your kind attention.