



**Follow-up Meeting of  
the 2nd ASEM Ministers Meeting on Education  
ASEM Lifelong Learning Conference  
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*“Bilateral, regional and Inter-Regional Cooperation in Lifelong Learning”*

*EU Perspective – presented by Anouk van Neck*

The global economic crisis is still one of the biggest challenges on the horizon. But the crisis makes the input of education and training, of skills and innovation, even more critical than before; to help people to survive the crisis by holding on to and improving their skills; and to prepare ourselves for the new opportunities that recovery and a changed economic order will bring.

The skills that made Europe the birthplace of the industrial revolution and a space of greatly increased prosperity in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not enough today. The world of work is changing and we must ensure that people have the right skills. Above all else, our young people must have the capacity to learn, and to keep learning through life, if they are to adapt to change, and to work in jobs that may not even exist yet.

The European Union places a high value on improving performance by learning from each other within a broad policy cooperation framework. It is worth remembering that within the EU each of the 27 Member States is responsible for their own education systems. Although each education system is unique, we all face the same challenges, and mutual learning can inspire all partners towards change.

The European Commission is committed to support countries in taking forward their reforms, agreeing common objectives, and identifying successful policies and practices. Together with the Member States, we have already identified key competences that people need to thrive in the knowledge economy – problem-solving and analytical skills, self management, entrepreneurship and team spirit, communication skills, languages and ICT.

The concept of Life Long Learning is not a new concept. The major difference today compared to its emergence in the European and international institutions more than 20 years ago, is that social societies have changed tremendously.

At the time of globalisation, the ageing of populations and the permanent technological change, the education and training systems are under incredible pressure. Modernising them is the only way possible to make the concept of life long learning a reality, as it is too often too theoretical.

The challenge of Life long learning has never been as important as today:

- To give everybody, especially to the part of the population that is most vulnerable, the chance to get strong educational basis via the acquisitions of key competences before the end of obligatory schooling. This includes a fundamental competence which is to learn how to learn. Future learning and updating of knowledge and qualifications cannot be realised without this.
- To develop, new, flexible and open environments that will enable young people as well as adults to learn continuously.
- To train teachers and trainers for their new role. Without appropriate investment in their initial and continuous training, any attempt to modernise the system will be in vain. They are the ones who will make the changes possible. Reforms need to be made with them.

I would like to use some data to illustrate the importance of the challenge:

- Around 80 million of adults in developed Europe are said to be unqualified. They therefore live under the 'necessary knowledge threshold' to live and work properly in the knowledge based society.
- 15% of young people are not achieving properly within the school system.
- Around 20% of 15 year olds don't have sufficient reading skills.
- Only 23% of working-age adults have completed higher education.

Recognising that education and training are essential to the development and success of today's knowledge society and economy, the EU's strategy emphasises countries working together and learning from each other.

EU education and training policy has been given added impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU's overarching programme focussing on growth and jobs. Knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU's most valuable assets, particularly as global competition becomes more intense in all sectors.

High quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are the fundament for Europe's success. Life long learning must become a reality across Europe and the world. It is the key to growth and jobs as well as to allow everyone the opportunity to participate fully in society.

EU Member States and the European Commission have therefore strengthened their political cooperation. This has been done through **the Education and Training 2010 work programme**, launched in 2001 and its follow-up, **the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training** adopted by the council in May 2009.

## Objectives and targets

The new strategic framework identifies four long term strategic objectives:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Based on these 4 strategic objectives, a number of priority areas are identified for concrete follow-up activities, for example expanding opportunities for learning mobility or enhancing partnerships between education and training institutions and the broader society.

In addition, **EU-level benchmarks** have been set for 2010 and 2020.

The benchmarks for 2010 are:

- the share of low achieving 15 year olds in reading should decrease by at least 20%; and
- the average rate of early school leavers should be no more than 10%;
- 85% of 22 year olds should complete upper secondary education;
- the total number of graduates in maths, science and technology should increase by at least 15%, while the gender imbalance in these subjects should be reduced
- the average participation of working adults population in lifelong learning should rise by at least 12.5%.

The benchmarks to be achieved by 2020 are:

- at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.
- the share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%.
- the share of early leavers from education and training<sup>9</sup> should be less than 10%.
- the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment<sup>8</sup> should be at least 40%.
- an average of at least 15 % of adults should participate in lifelong Learning

The third joint progress report<sup>1</sup> on the implementation of the **'Education and training 2010' work programme** attests that significant progress has been achieved in many areas. However, further efforts still need to be made, especially with regard to skill levels, **lifelong learning strategies** and the education, research and innovation "knowledge triangle".

Overall, progress throughout Europe has not been uniform nor have reforms been realised fast enough. Yet, most of the Member States have either already put into effect reforms, or are currently doing so, with regard to the following:

- development of **lifelong learning strategies** that define policy priorities and the relationship between different sectors, covering either all aspects of education and training or focusing only on specific systems or stages;
- development of **qualifications frameworks and validation of non-formal and informal learning**; however, it is now essential that Member States begin the application of these tools;
- **pre-primary education**, for which a number of Member States have run successful pilot projects on teaching content, staff training, quality assessment and financing that should now be implemented on a broad scale;
- modernisation of **higher education**, especially in terms of increasing the **autonomy of universities**;
- mainstreaming **education and training at the European Union (EU) policy level**, with progress achieved in linking operational programmes to the 'Education and training 2010' work programme and in the development of European reference tools, such as the **European Qualifications Framework** or the **key competences**.

The areas where progress has been slower than expected include:

- implementation of **lifelong learning strategies**;
- reduction in the number of **early school leavers**, increase in the number of young people completing at least **upper secondary education** and the acquisition of **key competences**;
- education, continuous training and professional development of **teachers**;

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<sup>1</sup> 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme – **'Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation'** [Official Journal C 86 of 5.4.2008].

- attainment of excellence in terms of education, research and knowledge transfer, and increase of both public and private investment in **higher education**;
- **participation of adults in lifelong learning**, in particular of older workers and the low skilled;
- improvement of the attractiveness, quality and relevance of **vocational education and training (VET)**, including its proper integration into the rest of the education system;
- increase in **transnational mobility** schemes provided at national level, with a focus on facilitating mobility also in VET.

Future work should concentrate, in particular, on implementing lifelong learning strategies, emphasising the role of education in the knowledge triangle and improving governance. The Member States' **lifelong learning strategies** could be more coherent or comprehensive. The strategies should be better linked to policy measures, the resources should be targeted more effectively and more efforts should be made to develop learning partnerships between national institutions and stakeholders. Hence, it is essential that:

- knowledge about the economic and social impact of education and training policies be improved;
- efforts to secure sustainable funding be strengthened;
- skills levels be raised, especially through the early acquisition of key competences and VET;
- socio-economic disadvantage be addressed, with priority placed on equal access, participation, treatment and outcomes;
- migrants be considered in education and training policies and systems;
- professional preparation and continuing development be provided for teachers.

As one of the fundamental elements of the **knowledge triangle**, education contributes to boosting growth and jobs. In addition to higher education, schools and VET have a significant role in facilitating innovation. Thus, it is of utmost importance that efforts are stepped up to enable partnerships between educational institutions and businesses and that excellence and key competences are developed throughout the different levels of education and training.

To further improve **governance**, it is imperative to give due consideration, both at the national and European levels, to the:

- setting of priorities in education and training policy with regard to lifelong learning;
- interlinking of relevant policies (e.g. innovation, research, employment);
- integration of developments in higher education, VET and adult learning within the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme;
- link between the Lisbon integrated guidelines and the 'Education and training 2010' work programme;
- monitoring of and informing on national policy developments;
- role of the civil society;
- development of benchmarks and indicators;
- use of Community funds and programmes.

While Member States have achieved progress in reforming certain strands of their education systems, persistent as well as certain new challenges still need to be addressed. Efforts to overcome these challenges should be stepped up. It is therefore essential that work on an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for post-2010 is begun now and that this is closely associated with the future development of the Lisbon process.

### **A single umbrella for education and training programmes**

The European Commission has integrated its various educational and training initiatives under a single umbrella, the **Lifelong Learning Programme** ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm)).

With a significant budget of nearly €7 billion for 2007 to 2013, the new programme replaces previous education, vocational training and e-Learning programmes, which ended in 2006.

The programme enables individuals at all stages of their lives to pursue stimulating learning opportunities across Europe. There are four sub-programmes focusing on different stages of education and training and continuing previous programmes:

- **Comenius** for schools ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84_en.htm))

Comenius seeks to develop knowledge and understanding among young people and educational staff of the diversity of European cultures, languages and values. It helps young people acquire the basic life skills and competences necessary for their personal development, for future employment and for active citizenship.

The programme addresses issues strongly related to current discussions and developments in **school policy**. The Comenius programme should involve at

least 3 million pupils in joint educational activities, over the period of the programme.

- Erasmus for higher education ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm))

Erasmus is the EU's flagship education and training programme, enabling more than 180,000 students to study and work abroad each year, as well as supporting co-operation actions between higher education institutions across Europe. It caters not only for students, but also for professors and business staff who want to teach abroad and for university staff who want to be trained abroad.

Erasmus became part of the EU's **Lifelong Learning Programme** in 2007 and expanded to cover new areas such as student placements in enterprises (transferred from the Leonardo da Vinci programme), university staff training and teaching for enterprise staff. The Programme seeks to expand its mobility actions even further in coming years, with the target of 3 million Erasmus students by 2012.

- Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc82\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc82_en.htm))

The Leonardo da Vinci programme links policy to practice in the field of vocational education and training (VET). Projects range from those giving individuals the chance to improve their competences, knowledge and skills through a period abroad, to Europe-wide co-operation between training organisations.

Innovation projects have always been at the core of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. They aim to improve the quality of training systems through the development and transfer of innovative policies, contents, methods and procedures within vocational education and training.

- Grundtvig for adult education ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86_en.htm))

The Grundtvig programme focuses on the teaching and study needs of those in adult education and alternative education streams, as well as the institutions and organisations delivering these services. Supporting lifelong learning and mobility in this way also tackles Europe's ageing population problem.

A transversal programme aims to ensure that they achieve the best results possible. Four key activities focus on **policy co-operation, languages, information and communication technologies, effective dissemination and exploitation of project results.**

Aiming for a geographical reach beyond Europe's borders, the Jean Monnet ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc88\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc88_en.htm)) programme stimulates teaching, reflection and debate on the European integration process at higher education institutions worldwide. With projects across the five continents, the programme reaches up to 250 000 students every year.

Creativity underpins all these – but it is not easy to make room for creativity in the learning environment. We need to rethink education: to focus, not on knowledge, but on skills; on what we can do with our knowledge. This calls for creativity in the education system too. We believe this can be best done in partnership. Skills such as creativity, initiative taking, entrepreneurship, cultural and civic skills – these are best developed in learning partnerships that extend beyond the school gate, involving business, cultural operators, community life.

Finally I want to highlight once more the growing network of education contacts between Europe and Asia: Erasmus Mundus, bilateral cooperation, the Jean Monnet programme and the European Centres of excellence.

By using all these cooperation opportunities to the full, universities in Asia and Europe can forge links to capitalise on their undoubted excellence and build the knowledge society that will ensure we weather the current storms.

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