



BERLAYMONT BUILDING BRUSSELS

WHAT IS LIFELONG LEARNING?

THE VIEW FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

ACCORDING TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, THE SCALE OF CURRENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE, THE RAPID TRANSITION TO A KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY AND DEMOGRAPHIC PRESSURES RESULTING FROM AN AGEING POPULATION IN EUROPE ARE ALL CHALLENGES WHICH DEMAND A NEW APPROACH TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF LIFELONG LEARNING.

LIFELONG LEARNING IS DEFINED AS 'ALL LEARNING ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN THROUGHOUT LIFE, WITH THE AIM OF IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCE, WITHIN A PERSONAL, CIVIC, SOCIAL AND/OR EMPLOYMENT-RELATED PERSPECTIVE.'

Lifelong learning is therefore about:

- + **acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications** from the pre-school years to post-retirement. It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future.
- + **valuing all forms of learning**, including: formal learning, such as a degree course followed at university; non-formal learning, such as vocational skills acquired at the workplace; and informal learning, such as inter-generational learning, for example where parents learn to use ICT through their children, or learning how to play an instrument together with friends.

The European Commission specifies that learning opportunities should be available to all citizens on an ongoing basis. In practice this should mean that citizens each have individual learning pathways, suitable to their needs and interests at all stages of their lives. The content of learning, the way learning is accessed, and where it takes place may vary depending on the learner and their learning requirements.

Lifelong learning is also about providing second chances to update basic skills and to offer learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to become much more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can truly be tailored to the needs of the learner, or indeed the potential learner.

COHERENT AND COMPREHENSIVE LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGIES: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

What are the tools that can better integrate learning environments and open up access for all European citizens to good quality learning opportunities appropriate to their needs at any time of life?

The consultation which followed the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning identified six essential elements for coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies:

- + **Partnership working**, not only between

decision-making levels (e.g. national, regional and local) but also between public authorities and education service providers (schools, universities, etc.), the business sector and the social partners, local associations, vocational guidance services, research centres, etc.

- + **Insight into the demand for learning** in the knowledge-based society - which will entail redefining basic skills, to include for instance the new information and communication technologies. Analyses should take into account foreseeable labour market trends.
- + **Adequate resourcing**, involving a substantial increase in public and private investment in learning. This does not only imply substantially increasing public budgets, but also ensuring the effective allocation of existing resources and encouraging new forms of investment. Investment in human capital is important at all points in the economic cycle; skills gaps and shortages can certainly co-exist with unemployment.
- + **Facilitating access to learning opportunities** by making them more visible, introducing new provision and removing obstacles to access, for example through the creation of more local learning centres. Special efforts are necessary in this context for different groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities or people living in rural areas.
- + **Creating a learning culture** by giving learning a higher profile, both in terms of image and by providing incentives for the people most reticent to opt for learning.
- + **Striving for excellence** through the introduction of quality control and indicators to measure progress. In concrete terms, provision must be made for standards, guidelines and mechanisms whereby achievements can be recognised and rewarded.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

On the basis of the feedback relating to the six key messages the Communication identifies six priorities for action: (1) valuing learning, (2) providing information, guidance and counseling, (3) investing time and money in learning, (4) bringing together learners and learning opportunities, (5) ensuring basic skills and (6) introducing innovative pedagogy.

Valuing learning is a key element in the creation of a culture of learning and for realising a European area of lifelong learning. The Communication stresses that a comprehensive new approach both to the mutual recognition of qualifications, and to the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning are needed in order to enable people to have individual learning pathways suitable to their needs and interests. Such an approach must be based on increased cooperation, and possibly based on voluntary minimum quality standards in education and training, creating the conditions for transparency and mutual trust.

Other key concrete action points include:

- + The Commission will also introduce a 'portfolio' system, which will enable citizens to present their competences and qualifications anywhere in Europe. The system will comprise the European CV.
- + As part of strengthening the European dimension of information, guidance and counselling services, the Commission will launch an internet portal on learning opportunities, aimed at bringing learning opportunities and learners together, and making learning more visible.
- + The Commission urges the European Investment Bank to support lifelong learning as part of the 'Innovation 2000' initiative. To supplement this, the European Investment Fund (EIF) could help to locate risk capital funding dedicated to the development of human capital - e.g. by supporting SMEs' access to learning.
- + The European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can be utilised to support lifelong learning, as can the EQUAL initiative. The ESF in particular is the main Community financial tool for supporting lifelong learning.
- + The Commission will encourage quality control through the granting of a European label to firms, in order to reward and publicise best lifelong learning practice.

For more information, please download the European Commission's memorandum on Lifelong Learning:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/III/III_en.html