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A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000 marks a **decisive moment for the direction of policy and action in the European Union**. Its conclusions affirm that Europe has indisputably moved into the Knowledge Age, with all that this will imply for cultural, economic and social life. Patterns of learning, living and working are changing apace. This means not simply that individuals must adapt to change, but equally that established ways of doing things must change too.

The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council confirm that the move towards **lifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society**. Therefore, Europe's education and training systems are at the heart of the coming changes. They too, must adapt. The conclusions of the Feira European Council invite the "Member States, the Council and the Commission ... within their areas of competence, to identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all".¹ This Memorandum takes up the Lisbon and Feira European Councils' mandate to implement lifelong learning. Its purpose is to **launch a European-wide debate** on a comprehensive strategy for implementing lifelong learning at individual and institutional levels, and in all spheres of public and private life.

The Commission and the Member States have defined lifelong learning, within the European Employment Strategy, as all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence.² This is the working definition adopted in this Memorandum as a starting-point for subsequent discussion and action.

Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it **must become the guiding principle** for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. **The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision**. All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change and to participate actively in the shaping of Europe's future.

The implications of this fundamental change in perspectives and practices deserve and justify the debate proposed here. **The Member States**, who are responsible for their education and training systems, **should lead this debate**. It should also be conducted in the Member States, and not only at European level. Lifelong learning concerns everyone's future, in a uniquely individual way. The debate should take place **as close as possible to citizens themselves**. **The Commission intends to draw up a report in autumn 2001 based on its outcomes**. This report will be taken up within the framework of the open method of co-ordination agreed by the Lisbon European Council.³

¹ Feira European Council conclusions, paragraph 33.

² The European Employment Strategy was initiated at the November 1997 Heads of State European Council in Luxembourg. This strategy established a monitoring and reporting procedure for all Member States, based on annually revised Employment Guidelines. The Employment Strategy rests on the four pillars employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities.

³ Lisbon European Council conclusions, paragraph 37. The new open method of co-ordination involves fixing European guidelines and timetables for achieving specific agreed goals, establishing (where appropriate) indicators and benchmarks in order to compare best practice, translating European guidelines into specific targets and measures adapted to fit national and regional differences, and establishing mutual learning processes based on regular monitoring, evaluation and peer review of progress. As stated in paragraph 38, "A fully decentralised approach will be applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership".

This Memorandum opens by stating the case for implementing lifelong learning. Section 2 argues that promoting active citizenship and promoting employability are equally important and interrelated aims for lifelong learning. Member States agree on its priority, but have been slow to take concerted action. Section 3 argues that the scale of current economic and social change in Europe demands a fundamentally new approach to education and training. Lifelong learning is the common umbrella under which all kinds of teaching and learning should be united. Putting lifelong learning into practice demands that everyone work together effectively – both as individuals and in organisations.

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3. A CITIZENS' EUROPE THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING

3.1. Knowledge societies: the challenge of change

Today's Europe is experiencing change on a scale comparable with that of the Industrial Revolution. Digital technology is transforming every aspect of people's lives, whilst biotechnology may one day change life itself. Trade, travel and communication on a world scale are expanding people's cultural horizons and are changing the ways in which economies compete with each other. Modern life brings greater chances and choices for individuals, but also greater risks and uncertainties. People have the freedom to adopt varied lifestyles, but equally the responsibility to shape their own lives. More people stay in education and training longer, but the gap is widening between those who are sufficiently qualified to keep afloat in the labour market and those who are falling irrevocably by the wayside. Europe's population is also ageing rapidly. This will change the make-up of the labour force and the patterns of demand for social, health and education services. Last but not least, European societies are turning into intercultural mosaics. This diversity holds great potential for creativity and innovation in all spheres of life.

This Memorandum cannot provide an in-depth analysis of the changes summarised so briefly immediately above. But they are all part and parcel of the overall transition to a knowledge society, whose economic basis is the creation and exchange of immaterial goods and services. In this kind of social world, up-to-date information, knowledge and skills are at a premium.

People themselves are the leading actors of knowledge societies. It is the human capacity to create and use knowledge effectively and intelligently, on a continually changing basis, that counts most. To develop this capacity to the full, people need to want and to be able to take their lives into their own hands – to become, in short, active citizens.¹² Education and training throughout life is the best way for everyone to meet the challenge of change.

3.2. A continuum of learning throughout life

The knowledge, skills and understanding we learn as children and as young people in the family, at school, during training and at college or university will not last a lifetime. Integrating learning more firmly into adult life is a very important part of putting lifelong learning into practice, but it is, nevertheless, just one part of the whole. Lifelong learning sees all learning as a seamless continuum 'from cradle to grave.' **High quality basic education for all, from a child's youngest days forward, is the essential foundation.** Basic education, followed by initial vocational education and training, should equip all young people with the new basic skills required in a knowledge-based economy. It should also ensure that they have 'learnt to learn' and that they have a positive attitude towards learning.

People will only plan for consistent learning activities throughout their lives if they *want* to learn. They will not want to continue to learn if their experiences of learning in early life have been unsuccessful and personally negative. They will not want to carry on if appropriate learning opportunities are not practically accessible as far as timing, pace, location and affordability are concerned. They will not feel motivated to take part in learning whose content and methods do not take proper account of their cultural perspectives and life experiences. And they will not want to invest time, effort and money in further learning if the knowledge, skills and expertise they have already acquired are not recognised in tangible ways, whether for personal reasons or for getting ahead at work. Individual motivation to learn and a variety of learning opportunities are the ultimate keys to implementing lifelong learning successfully. It is essential to **raise the demand for learning as well as its supply**, most especially for those who have benefited least from education and training so far. Everyone should be able to follow open learning pathways of their own choice, rather than being obliged to follow predetermined routes to specific destinations. This means, quite simply, that education and training systems should adapt to individual needs and demands rather than the other way round.

[...]

The term ‘lifelong’ learning draws attention to time: learning throughout life, either continuously or periodically. The newly-coined term ‘lifewide’ learning enriches the picture by drawing attention to the spread of learning, which can take place across the full range of our lives at any one stage in our lives.¹³ **The ‘lifewide’ dimension brings the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning into sharper focus.** It reminds us that useful and enjoyable learning can and does take place in the family, in leisure time, in community life and in daily worklife. Lifewide learning also makes us realise that teaching and learning are themselves roles and activities that can be changed and exchanged in different times and places.

However, lifelong learning is still defined in a variety of ways in different national contexts and for different purposes. The latest available policy reviews¹⁴ suggest that definitions remain largely informal and pragmatic, wedded more closely to action than to conceptual clarity or legal terms. The driving force that brought lifelong learning back onto policy agendas in the 1990s has been the concern to improve citizens’ employability and adaptability in the face of high levels of structural unemployment, hitting the poorest qualified hardest. The prospect of a sharply ageing European population means that the need for up-to-date knowledge and skills cannot be met by relying mainly on new entrants to the labour market, as happened in the past – there will be too few young people and the pace of technological change is too fast, particularly the accelerating shift to the digital economy.

¹² Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000, 182 countries committed themselves to six goals to meet the basic learning needs of all. These goals include improving adult literacy rates levels and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

Education for active citizenship in the European Union, OPOCE, Luxembourg, 1998.

¹³ For example, see: Lifelong Learning and Lifewide Learning, National Agency for Education, Stockholm, January 2000.

¹⁴ EURYDICE European Unit, The challenge of lifelong learning for the education systems of European Union Member States, Brussels, 2000; CEDEFOP, An Age of Learning, Thessaloniki, 2000; ECOTEC, The Contribution of Community Programmes, Funds and Initiatives to Lifelong Learning, Report to the European Commission, Education and Culture DG, August 2000.

Today, a noticeable shift towards more integrated policies that combine social and cultural objectives with the economic rationale for lifelong learning is taking place.¹⁵

New ideas about the balance of rights and responsibilities of citizens and public authorities have begun to take hold. More people have become more confident about claiming distinctive identities and ways of life. There is now widespread demand for decisions to be taken as close as possible to people's daily lives, and with their greater participation. For these reasons, attention has turned to the need to modernise governance at all levels of European societies.¹⁶ At the same time, gaps have widened between the mainstream of social life and those who are at risk of long-term social exclusion. Education and training have become more important than ever before in influencing people's chances of 'getting in, getting on and getting up' in life. The increasingly complex patterns of young people's initial transitions between learning and working may be an indication of what lies in store for people of all ages in the future. Employability is obviously a key outcome of successful learning, but social inclusion rests on more than having paid work. Learning opens the door to building a satisfying and productive life, quite apart from a person's employment status and prospects.

3.3. Working together to put lifelong learning into practice

Although comprehensive and coherent strategies have not yet been developed by the majority of Member States, all recognise that working together in **a variety of partnerships is an essential** means of putting lifelong learning into practice. These partnerships include co-operation between ministries and public authorities to develop co-ordinated policies. They systematically integrate **the Social Partners** in the development and implementation process, in conjunction with public-private initiatives. Partnerships thrive, above all, through the active involvement of local and regional bodies and civil society organisations, who provide services that are close to the citizens and are better adapted to the specific needs of local communities.¹⁷ European Community education, training and youth programmes, for their part, have proved their worth in supporting transnational co-operation, partnership and exchange to develop good practice.

The continuum of lifelong *and* lifewide learning also means that the different levels and sectors of education and training systems, including non-formal domains, must work in close concertation with each other. Here, **working together effectively** will mean going beyond existing efforts to build bridges and pathways between different parts of existing systems. Creating a person-centred network of lifelong learning opportunity **introduces the vision of gradual osmosis between structures of provision** that remain, today, relatively disconnected from each other. Current debates in the Member States on the future of universities are an example of how policy thinking is beginning to grapple with the practical implications of this vision. Opening university studies to new and wider publics cannot be achieved unless higher education institutions themselves change – not only internally, but also in their relations with other 'learning systems'.¹⁸ The vision of gradual osmosis brings a dual challenge: firstly, appreciating the complementarity of formal, non-formal and informal learning; secondly, developing open networks of opportunity and recognition between all three learning settings.

¹⁵ Kearns, P. et al. VET in the learning age: the challenge of lifelong learning for all, Vol. 1, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Kensington Park, Australia, 1999, p. 25.

¹⁶ This includes the European level; a White Paper on European Governance will be published by the Commission in 2001.

¹⁷ The European dimension of education: its nature, content and prospects. Information report, Economic and Social Committee, Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, 13 June 2000 (SOC/019 final). See also the Committee of the Regions Opinion on Citizenship (accessible via: http://www.cor.eu.int/coratwork/avis_32plen/226-99/226-1999_EN.doc)

¹⁸ Responding to challenges for European Universities – Implementing changes in institutional and disciplinary co-operation, F2000 European Higher Education Forum, EUCEN (European Universities Continuing Education Network), Liege, July 2000.

4. TAKING ACTION ON LIFELONG LEARNING: SIX KEY MESSAGES

4.1. Key Message 1: New basic skills for all

Objective: Guarantee universal and continuing access to learning for gaining and renewing the skills needed for sustained participation in the knowledge society

This is the essential foundation for active citizenship and employability in 21st century Europe. Economic and social change are modifying and upgrading the profile of basic skills that everyone should have as a minimum entitlement, enabling active participation in working life, family life and all levels of community life – from local through to European. The new basic skills included in the Lisbon European Council conclusions (paragraph 26) are IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list, but it certainly covers key areas. Nor does the list imply that the traditional basic skills of literacy and numeracy are no longer important. But it is important to note that this is not a list of subjects or disciplines as we know them from our schooldays and beyond. It specifies broadly defined areas of knowledge and competence, all of which are interdisciplinary: learning foreign languages, for example, involves acquiring technical, cultural and aesthetic capacities for communication, performance and appreciation. General, vocational and social skills hence increasingly overlap in content and function.

As a starting-point for discussion, **this Memorandum defines new basic skills as those required for active participation in the knowledge society and economy** – in the labour market and at work, in real-time and in virtual communities and in a democracy, and as a person with a coherent sense of identity and direction in life. Some of these skills – such as digital literacy – are genuinely new, whereas others – such as foreign languages – are becoming more important for many more people than in the past. Social skills such as self-confidence, self-direction and risk-taking are also increasingly important, because people are expected to be able to behave much more autonomously than in the past. Entrepreneurial skills release capacities both to improve individual job performance and to diversify company activities; they also contribute to job creation, both within existing enterprises – especially SMEs – and for self-employment. Learning how to learn, to adapt to change and to make sense of vast information flows are now generic skills that everyone should acquire. Employers are increasingly demanding the ability to learn and acquire new skills rapidly and to adapt to new challenges and situations.

A solid command of these basic skills is crucial for everyone, but it is only the beginning of a continuum of learning throughout life. Today's labour markets demand ever-changing profiles of skills, qualifications and experience. Skills gaps and mismatches, particularly in ICT, are widely recognised as a significant reason why unemployment levels are persistently high in particular regions, industrial branches and for disadvantaged social groups. Those who have not been able, for whatever reason, to acquire the relevant basic skills threshold must be offered continuing opportunities to do so, however often they may have failed to succeed or to take up what has been offered so far. Member States' formal education and training systems – whether initial, further/higher or adult/continuing – are responsible for ensuring, as far as possible, that each and every individual acquires, updates and sustains an agreed skills threshold. Non-formal learning domains also have a very important role to play in these respects. This all requires the assurance of high quality learning experience and outcome for as many people as possible. It equally demands continuous review of basic skills reference levels, so that what is educationally provided matches what is economically and socially needed.

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4.2. Key Message 2: More investment in human resources

Objective: Visibly raise levels of investment in human resources in order to place priority on Europe's most important asset – its people

The Lisbon European Council conclusions set clear aims for all concerned to increase the annual per capita investment in human resources, and the Employment Guidelines (13, 14 and 16) invite Member States to set corresponding targets. This means not only that **current investment levels are regarded as too low to ensure the replenishment of the skills pool**, but that **it is necessary to re-think what counts as investment altogether**. Taxation regimes, accounting standards and company reporting and disclosure requirements in the Member States differ. For this reason alone, no single solutions are feasible – as in the case of treating company investment in human resources on an equal basis as capital investment. But neither would they be desirable: respect for diversity is the guiding principle of Community action. One way forward could be for Social Partners to establish framework agreements on lifelong learning generally, setting targets for continuing training (based on best practice) and introducing a European award for particularly progressive companies. There is equally a need to make investment in human resources more transparent.

At individual level, however, there is no doubt that incentive measures must be more fully developed. The idea of individual learning accounts is an example, by which people are encouraged to contribute to the cost of their own learning through special savings and deposits that attract matching or supplementary grants and benefits from public and private funding sources. Company schemes that give employees an amount of time or money to pursue learning of their own choice or agreed to be vocationally relevant is another example. In some Member States, rights to subsidised study leave have been negotiated for employees, and the unemployed, too, have rights to training opportunities. There are, furthermore, examples of companies that provide opportunities for employees on parental leave to participate in skills updating courses during their leave period or before they return to work again. As far as workplace-based or work-related learning is concerned, particular attention will have to be paid in the coming decade to those aged over 35. This is partly because demographic trends will increase the strategic importance of older employees. Participation in continuing education and training also currently falls off sharply for older workers, most especially for the less qualified and those in lower level jobs.

Employers have registered a rising demand to move to part-time contracts, not simply for family-related reasons but also in order to pursue further studies. This remains, in many cases, difficult to organise in practice, although levels of voluntary part-time working do vary markedly between Member States – room for exchange of good practice clearly exists. More generally, the **Social Partners have an important role** to play in negotiating agreements for co-funding of learning for employees and more flexible working arrangements that make participation in learning practically feasible. Investing in human resources is therefore also question of enabling people to manage their own 'time-life portfolios' and making a wider range of learning outcomes more visible for all concerned. Creative and innovative approaches to investing in human resources are an integral part of developing learning organisations.

Whatever the particular measures devised in individual Member States, industries, occupational sectors or individual companies, the important point is that raising investment in human resources requires moving towards a culture of shared responsibilities and towards clear co-financing arrangements for participation in lifelong learning.

[...]

4.3. Key Message 3: Innovation in teaching and learning

Objective: Develop effective teaching and learning methods and contexts for the continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning

As we move into the Knowledge Age, our understandings of what learning is, where and how it takes place, and for what kinds of purposes, are changing. We increasingly expect teaching and learning methods and contexts to recognise and adapt to a highly diverse range of interests, needs and demands, not only of individuals but also of specific interest groups in multicultural European societies. This implies **a major shift towards user-oriented learning systems with permeable boundaries across sectors and levels**. Enabling individuals to become active learners implies both improving existing practices and developing new and varied approaches to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT and by the full range of learning contexts.

Quality of learning experience and outcome is the touchstone, including in the eyes of learners themselves. But little effective change and innovation can take place without the active involvement of professionals in the field, who are closest to the citizen as learner and are most familiar with the diversity of learning needs and processes. **ICT-based learning technologies offer great potential** for innovation in teaching and learning methods, although practising educationalists insist that, to be fully effective, these must be embedded in 'real time' contexts and relationships between teachers and learners. New methods must also take account of the changing roles of tutors and teachers who are separated from their students by distance and time.¹⁹ Furthermore, **most of what our education and training systems offer is still organised and taught as if the traditional ways of planning and organising one's life had not changed for at least half a century**. Learning systems must adapt to the changing ways in which people live and learn their lives today. This is especially important for achieving gender equality and catering to an increasingly active 'Third Age' citizenry. We still know and share too little, for example, about how to generate productive self-directed learning, whilst remembering that learning is ultimately a social process; how senior citizens best learn; how to adjust learning environments to enable integration of the disabled; or what the potential for mixed-age learning groups could be for cognitive, practical and social skills development.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning methods and contexts will mean significant investment by Member States to adapt, upgrade and sustain the skills of those working in formal and non-formal learning environments, whether as paid professionals, as volunteers or as those for whom teaching activities are a secondary or ancillary function (for example, experienced skilled tradespeople in the workplace or community development workers). Education and training practitioners work in a wide variety of establishments and with very different kinds of learners. Quite often, the fact that their work has to do with teaching and learning goes unrecognised – including by themselves, as in the case, for example, of those working in youth organisations.²⁰ This all means, above all, thoroughgoing review and reform of initial and in-service teacher training, so that it genuinely caters to the full range of learning contexts and target groups.

¹⁹ For example, see *Study Circles in Targeted Intelligence Networks*, JRC/IPTS, Sevilla, 2000.

²⁰ *Lifelong Learning – A Youth Perspective*, European Youth Forum/Free University of Brussels, Brussels, December 1997.

Teaching as a professional role faces decisive change in the coming decades: **teachers and trainers become guides, mentors and mediators**. Their role – and it is a crucially important one – is to help and support learners who, as far as possible, take charge of their own learning. The capacity and the confidence to develop and practise open and participatory teaching and learning methods should therefore become an essential professional skill for educators and trainers, in both formal and non-formal settings. Active learning presupposes the motivation to learn, the capacity to exercise critical judgement and the skill of knowing how to learn. The irreplaceable heart of the teaching role lies in nurturing precisely these human capacities to create and use knowledge.

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4.4. Key Message 4: Valuing learning

Objective: Significantly improve the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly non-formal and informal learning.

In the knowledge economy, developing and using human resources to the full is a decisive factor in maintaining competitiveness. In this context, diplomas, certificates and qualifications are an important reference point for employers and individuals alike on the labour market and in the enterprise. The rising demand for qualified labour by employers and increased competition between individuals to gain and keep employment is leading to **much higher demand for recognised learning than ever before**. How best to modernise national certification systems and practices for new economic and social conditions has become an important policy and professional issue in all parts of the Union.

Education and training systems provide a service to individuals, to employers and to civil society as a whole. Ensuring that learning is visibly and appropriately recognised is an integral element of the quality of service that is provided. For an integrated Europe, both an open labour market and citizens' rights to free movement to live, study, train and work in all Member States demand that knowledge, skills and qualifications are both more readily understandable and more practically 'portable' within the Union. Valuable progress has been achieved in transparency and mutual recognition agreements, especially in the higher education sector and for regulated professional and technical occupations.

There is broad consensus, however, that we need to do much more in this area for the benefit of much wider segments of the population and the labour market. Explicit recognition – in whatever form – is an effective means to motivate 'non-traditional learners' as well as those who have not been active in the labour force for some time due to unemployment, family responsibilities or illness. Innovative forms of certification for non-formal learning are also important for widening the recognition spectrum altogether, regardless of the type of learner at hand.

It is absolutely essential to develop high quality systems for the Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL), and to promote their application in a wide variety of contexts. Employers and admissions tutors in education and training institutions also need to be persuaded of the worth of this kind of certification. APEL systems evaluate and recognise individuals' existing knowledge, skills and experience gained over long periods and in diverse contexts, including in non-formal and informal settings. The methods used can uncover skills and competencies that individuals themselves may not have realised they possess and can offer to employers. The very process requires the active participation of the candidate, which in itself raises individuals' confidence and self-image.

Diverse national terminology and underlying cultural assumptions continue to render transparency and mutual recognition a hazardous and delicate exercise. In this area, recourse to technical expertise in designing and operating reliable and valid recognition systems is essential. This must be accompanied by **greater involvement of those who ultimately validate credentials in practice** and who are closely familiar with the ways in which individuals and enterprises use credentials in everyday life. The Social Partners and relevant NGOs are therefore no less important than are official authorities and professional educators.

[...]

4.5. Key Message 5: Rethinking guidance and counselling

Objective: Ensure that everyone can easily access good quality information and advice about learning opportunities throughout Europe and throughout their lives.

In the past, moving between education, training and the labour market happened only once in most people's lives – as young people, leaving school or university to find a job, perhaps with one or more periods of vocational training in between. Today, we may all need information and advice on 'what to do next' at several times in our lives, and perhaps quite unpredictably. This is an integral part of planning and carrying through a life project as an ongoing process, in which paid work is but one component, however important that might be. Weighing up the options and making decisions certainly demands relevant and accurate information, but professional advice can frequently help to clarify one's mind.

In this context, a new approach is needed which envisages **guidance as a continuously accessible service for all**, and which overcomes the distinction between educational, vocational and personal guidance, and which reaches out to new publics. Living and working in the knowledge society calls for active citizens who are self-motivated to pursue their own personal and professional development. This means that systems of provision must shift from a supply-side to a demand-side approach, placing users' needs and demands at the centre of concern.

The practitioner's task is to accompany individuals on their unique journey through life, by releasing motivation, providing relevant information and facilitating decisionmaking. This includes developing a more proactive approach – that is, reaching out towards people rather than simply waiting for them to come for advice, and following up on progress made. It also includes taking positive action to prevent and recoup failure to learn and drop-out from education and training courses.

The future role of guidance and counselling professionals could be described as 'brokerage'. With the client's interests in the forefront, the 'guidance broker' is able to call on and tailor a wide range of information in order to help decide on the best course of action for the future. ICT/Internet-based sources of information and diagnostic tools open up new horizons for improving the range and the quality of guidance and counselling services. They can enrich and extend the professional role, but clearly cannot replace it – and the new technologies bring new potential problems to resolve. For example, guidance and counselling practitioners will have to develop high-level capacities for information management and analysis. They will be called upon to assist people to find their way through the information labyrinth, helping them to search out what is meaningful and useful for their own needs. In a globalised universe of learning provision, people will also need guidance on the quality of what is on offer.

²¹ This Forum was set up as a joint initiative by the European Commission and CEDEFOP.

For all these reasons, guidance and counselling services must move towards more ‘holistic’ styles of provision, able to address a range of needs and demands and a variety of publics. It is self-evident that such **services must be locally accessible**. Practitioners must be familiar with the personal and social circumstances of those for whom information and advice is provided, but must equally know the profile of the local labour market and employers’ needs. Guidance and counselling services also need to be linked more firmly into networks of related personal, social and educational services. This would enable the pooling of specific expertises, experiences and resources.

In recent years, it has also been increasingly recognised that a good deal of information and advice is sought and found through non-formal and informal channels. Professional guidance and counselling services are beginning to take these factors into account, not only by developing networks with local associations and voluntary groups but also by designing ‘low threshold’ services in familiar settings. These are important strategies for improving access for highly disadvantaged target groups.

Traditionally, guidance and counselling have been provided as public services and were originally designed to accompany initial transitions between school and the labour market. Over the past thirty years, market-based services have mushroomed, especially for the highly qualified. In some Member States, many guidance and counselling services are wholly or partially privatised. Companies themselves have also begun to invest in guidance services for their employees. Nevertheless, **it remains the responsibility of the public sector to set agreed minimum quality standards and to define entitlements**.

[...]

4.6. Key Message 6: Bringing learning closer to home

Objective: Provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible, in their own communities and supported through ICT-based facilities wherever appropriate.

Regional and local levels of governance have become increasingly influential in recent years in line with intensified demand for decisionmaking and services ‘close to the ground’. The provision of education and training is one of the policy areas destined to be part of this trend – **for most people**, from childhood through to old age, **learning happens locally**. Local and regional authorities are also the ones that provide the infrastructure of access to lifelong learning, including childcare, transport and social welfare services. Mobilising the resources of regional and local authorities in support of lifelong learning is therefore essential. Equally, civil society organisations and associations have their strongest roots at local level, and typically possess vast reservoirs of knowledge and experience about the communities of which they are part.

Cultural diversity is Europe’s distinctive trademark. Particular localities may have different characteristics and problems, but they all share a unique distinctiveness of place and identity. The familiar distinctiveness of people’s home community and region gives confidence and provides social networks. These resources are important for lending meaning to learning and for supporting positive learning outcomes.

Varied and locally accessible lifelong learning opportunities helps to ensure that people are not *compelled* to leave their home region to study and train – although they should equally be able to choose to do so, and the experience of such mobility should be a positive learning experience in itself. For some groups, such as the disabled, it is just not always possible to be physically mobile. In such cases, equal access to learning can only be achieved by bringing learning to the learners themselves. **ICT offers great potential for reaching scattered and isolated populations** in cost-effective ways – not only for learning itself, but also for communication that serves to maintain community identity across large distances. More generally, ‘round-the-clock’ and ‘on-the-move’ access to learning services – including on-line learning - enables everyone to use their learning time to best advantage, wherever they may physically be at a given moment.

Densely populated urban areas, for their part, can weld multiple partnerships from a hub of diversity, using **lifelong learning as the driver for local and regional regeneration**. The city, meeting-point of constantly changing groups and ideas, has always been a magnet for innovation and debate. Urban environments brim over with learning opportunities of all kinds, from everyday street life to fast-paced enterprises and for young and old alike. Villages, towns and cities have also already built up a range of contacts with partner communities across Europe through town-twinning programmes and activities, many of which are supported with Community funding. These activities provide a basis for transnational co-operation and exchange between communities and localities that have a range of similar characteristics and problems to resolve, and which therefore offer a natural platform of interest for non-formal learning initiatives. ICT expands these opportunities by creating the possibility for virtual communication between local communities physically far apart.

Inclusive partnerships and integrated approaches are better able to reach (potential) learners and respond coherently to their learning needs and demands. Incentive schemes and other support measures can encourage and support a proactive approach to lifelong learning both by individuals themselves and by cities and regions as co-ordinating contexts. Bringing learning closer to home will also require reorganisation and redeployment of resources to create appropriate kinds of **learning centres in everyday locations** where people gather – not only in schools themselves, but also, for example, in village halls and shopping malls, libraries and museums, places of worship, parks and public squares, train and bus stations, health centres and leisure complexes, and workplace canteens.

[...]