



Statements Interim Report

The European Network of Education Councils adopted the following statements on the draft interim report Education and Training 2010 (version 20-01-04) on its General Assembly of 27 January 2004 in London.

1 A coherent and inclusive strategy for education and training 2010

EUNEC supports the strategy for an inclusive and coherent strategy integrating LLL, the Bologna process, the objectives-process and the Copenhagen process to assist member states to achieve the Lisbon goals.

These LLL, education and training policies and their reporting should be linked closely to the development and reporting of all associated policies, such as employment and social policies.

2 Specific aspects of education and training missions in the Member States of the EU

After the Lisbon European Council, in March 2001, the European Council assigned to education and training three strategic goals and 13 associated concrete objectives to allow Europe “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

EUNEC supports this project, as long as, in the aims and means used to reach the objectives, the other education and training missions are taken into account to the same extent.

Education and training must indeed create the conditions to enable the young, the men and the women, to develop and enrich their personality, as well as to assume their integration in society in a critical and creative way. Education and training are responsible for offering to all, the necessary tools for an active participation to life in the society. They must also contribute to the social integration of the users by assuring their social and economic independence, by pursuing an objective of equal opportunities for all, but also in respecting the specific needs of the individuals and in acknowledgment of what they are.

Consequently, access to employment is therefore a mission of education and training, but it is one among others.

EUNEC wishes all the missions of education and training to be taken into account sufficiently, on the national as well as on the European level. It is advisable, for example, when the words “human capital” are used, to include all the aspects linked to this concept, such as skills acquisition, personal development, capacity of integration in the active life, well

being. The individual must remain the master of his own capital and not simply become a pawn in the economic game. This broader concept of 'human capital' comes nearer to the concept of 'social capital' in which one wishes to enable individuals to co-ordinate their actions with others towards common goals.

Furthermore all partners must distinguish between the responsibilities of the European Union on the one hand and those of the member states on the other hand, respecting the principle of subsidiarity concerning their systems of education and training.

3 Choice of the priority objectives and allocation of investments

EUNEC agrees on the approach taken into the report (cfr. Point 2.2.2) : “ ... , the prime task of school is to work through education, to provide successful training for every young person, by supporting their aspirations and making the most of their abilities”.

We are linking the priorities set forward here to the priorities laid down in the benchmarks.

Compulsory education is the crucial sector in the acquisition of knowledge and basic skills, as well as a determining factor in the socialisation of youngsters, the building of their personality and the acquisition of values. Compulsory education also contributes to the efficiency of higher education and continuing vocational training.

EUNEC believes that the valorisation of others sectors (higher education, continuing vocational education, LLL) would be inefficient if this was to develop at the expense of compulsory education.

EUNEC is convinced that investments in these other sectors, should not be geared exclusively to private economic returns. We endorse the emphasis put on both increasing investment and making sure this investment is efficient. Both the European (structural funds and European investment bank) and the national levels should invest in areas which result in higher quality and increased relevance in the needs of society and in the needs of individuals.

Equal opportunities and social inclusion are basic items on the agenda of any educational policy. The Commission underlines in its report the importance of targeting the efforts to disadvantaged groups. In this context, it appears necessary to determine the means to be allotted and the indicators to be used for the follow-up of the implementation of these items, if we are to avoid staying on the level of generalised abstraction.

4 Approach to the increase in investments

Increasing the investments in the field of education and training is necessary. According to EUNEC an uncontrolled participation of the private economic sector in education and training, might lead to a modification in the aims without any democratic debate. Private and public investment in education and training must therefore be conceived in a well balanced framework of regulations and quality assurance that underpin the social and economic goals to be achieved.

It is an essential role for the state to guarantee free compulsory education. The state has a strong responsibility towards disadvantaged and excluded groups, since the private sector is unlikely to fund this aspect of education and training.

5 Approach to statistical indicators

Heads of states have agreed on five benchmarks, which are the standards to measure the progress made by member states towards the Lisbon objectives. Benchmarks not only aim at economic development but also to social cohesion. So we need indicators that monitor progress effectively. These indicators/this monitoring need(s) to be backed up by a reliable system for collecting and analysing appropriate data.

It is in the general and public interest, that all the public authorities in the European Union should encourage the collection of all available data in the field of education and training according to a standardised protocol.

The implementation of a European policy in the field of education and training, which takes the humanistic, social and economic dimensions into account, assumes that the public authorities use both quantitative and qualitative statistical indicators covering all the dimensions. Given the principle of subsidiarity, these indicators must also take into account the specific aspects of the educational systems of each member state of the Union.

The indicators must be set up in function of the political guidelines determined by the political authorities, and therefore one must avoid using – for practical and budgetary reasons- only indicators that are essentially quantitative or those that already existed before the implementation of new policies.

It would be interesting to take other (non economic) types of indicators into account, which would describe parameters linked to citizenship, social cohesion, solidarity, capacity for happiness and a certain view of humanism ¹.

This would reflect the approach taken by the UN, in developing the human development index.

¹ statistical data about suicides, or addictions;
assessment of exclusion in relation to access to the labour market, to education and training, to housing...; measurement of violence, and delinquency;
statistical data about citizens' involvement in community and political activity
measurement of the feeling of well being of students and teachers, of parents satisfaction,
harassment/mobbing, asocial behaviour, the integration of schools in their immediate environment...)

6 Subsidiarity

The Commission declares:

“The development of common European references and principles can usefully support national policies and contribute to developing mutual trust between the key players and encouraging reform. Such common references and principles can not create obligations for Member States but provide a basis around which future development could converge.

(...)

These European common references and principles should be developed as a matter of priority and implemented at national level.” (2.2.3)

EUNEC acknowledges the necessity to develop reference tools to ensure European citizens mobility within the Union. But, respecting subsidiarity, EUNEC rejects standardization of curricula and processes. If it is desirable to agree on common final objectives, for reasons of efficiency, each member state must be responsible for their implementation in function of its means and its culture. The diversity of education systems reflects the cultural diversity which is and must remain a treasure of Europe with regard to a common challenge .

7 Approach to consultation and harmonisation tools implemented in the Lisbon process

The Commission establishes in its communication that: “the urgent nature of the challenges to be faced means we have to use the open method of coordination to the full - while fully complying with the principle of subsidiarity”.

The open method of co-ordination is a key method but not the only being used in these matters. But EUNEC reminds that it must respect the transparency required by a sound democratic decision-making. This implies that European Union authorities set up a specific consultation procedure, in the field of education and training, with all representative partners (social and economic partners as well as all the educational partners), clearly identified and authorised. The action plan for the next stage needs to be identified clearly with regard to the implementation in practice of the conclusions reached through the Lisbon process, including the outcomes of the Bologna and Copenhagen process.

Debating about education and training without taking into account all of their missions, should be avoided, as well as giving priorities to initiatives or objectives with an economical approach only, at the expense of social and cultural approaches.