

Consultation on the future EU2020 strategy – British Council submission

This submission is on behalf of the British Council, the UK's international cultural relations organisation, and a member of the EUNIC network. (European Union National Institutes of Culture) We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Commission's working document. We would like to comment on the following areas:

Diversity

In relation to issues of migration, identity and social cohesion, the working document could present the problem and opportunity much more clearly. There is a real opportunity here for Europe to present itself globally as a truly diverse and integrated continent. A boldness of vision along these lines would be welcome, matched with the tools that can actually deliver cohesion and creativity from diversity. This internationalist perspective is critical as Europe risks developing a protectionist mentality and becoming a fortress as a result of the recent financial crisis.

European values

The working document recommends fostering European values globally. But have we defined these with sufficient clarity? It seems to us that it is the continuing challenge around understanding who we think we are and how the world sees us that is at the heart of this. How do people become European and engage with Europeans? It was interesting to see that the collapse of COP-15 at Copenhagen was as much about a lack of understanding and convergence around behaviour and language as about substantive issues. For example, whereas we see ourselves as inclusive, others may see us as exclusive.

Empowering people through skills

This requires a radically different approach to education at both primary and secondary levels as well as in the further education sector. How do we generate the required creativity, adaptability and resilience in individuals and society? This is a fundamental question we need to address because the current risk-averse and target-based learning culture that we are creating does not generate it. The cultural sector has a significant role to play here, and will inform political debate, which is all too often hamstrung by economic and investment factors.

In general the working document seems to lose the focus of the *Lisbon Strategy*, which emphasised *competencies* over *skills*. There is now a weakened link between 'start-ups' as job creation and the need for intelligent 'investment'. Where are the links to the Commission's own policy paper, 'Empowering and Investing in Young People'? On the issue of Young People - the current generation - we should champion a Rights-based Europe with a Responsibilities-based workforce. This would give a strong signal for the current generation. They are in need of a stimulus and nurturing to set the European 'priorities in a ten-year horizon'. Young people, the unemployed and immigrants did not create the 'crisis'.

Universities and EU research networks

What we really want are stronger Higher and Further Education sectors *globally*, engaging with EU institutions about global challenges. Is there not a tautology in stating that we have best universities in the world, but that we must benchmark against the best in the world? Additionally there is little attention paid in the working document to the major work already underway on Learning Mobility, through the Green Paper consultation. There is an over-emphasis in the paper on school-leaving and university-level experience, in an Erasmus mindset. Additional and alternative forms of learning are beyond the radar. We agree that research networks are important, but shouldn't we also be talking about innovation networks, and shouldn't these be global too? Europe has a role in the world here - rather than simply stopping at European borders.

Technology

On the technocratic plan, internet connectivity does not make the internet an educative and business tool. Broadband without learning is an empty vessel. The focus on workforce development, more positive imaging of alternative skills, an emphasis on job-shadowing, all need expanding. Where is the work to be done on 'social partners and civil society'? There needs to be a focus on how new forms of civic structures and citizenship activism can support the transformation we require.

Languages

A knowledge based economy successfully competing in the world needs a workforce far better skilled in languages, both European languages and the world's major languages. The British Council is committed to promoting multilingualism, and actively supports EUNIC (European Union National Institutes of Culture) in its role as chair of the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism, and contributes as a member of the Business platform. Through both we will be seeking ways to increase the provision of language learning and language use. This extends further than the school system into lifelong learning. The decade is likely to lead to an increase in the working age and so mid career language learning will become a key factor. The increase in workforce mobility itself necessitates greater language abilities both for the person moving and in the receiving country.

The role of culture and cultural relations

The working document focuses principally on economics and employment. In our view the EU2020 strategy needs to have a greater emphasis on the social and the cultural. These are the essential underpinnings of the economy. We recommend that in all areas within the strategy there is explicit recognition of the social and cultural impact of the programme with appropriate measures incorporated from the start.

The British Council, and its counterparts in EUNIC, work in the field of cultural relations, which is all about people to people contact, within Europe, and between Europe and the rest of the world. This is done through programmes in education, languages, sport, science and the arts. These are sectors which play a major role, not just in the economy of Europe, but as key factors in facilitating behavioural and cultural change. The EU2020 working document seeks radical changes to meet the radically different landscape of the next decade. The cultural relations work done by the British Council and its partners provides an important means to underpin those changes at the people to people level.

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