

COMMISSION WORKING DOCUMENT

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE « EU 2020 » STRATEGY

EUCEN CONTRIBUTION

First of all, as introduction of our contribution, we would like to explain the perspective adopted by EUCEN in reading and reacting to the Commission working document on the future “EU 2020” strategy. We do not want to contribute to this consultation on the whole university dimension. Our reflections and propositions are based on the EUCEN project: to contribute to the economic and cultural life of Europe through the promotion and advancement of lifelong learning within higher education institutions and to foster universities' influence in the development of lifelong learning knowledge and policies. In addition our reactions are guided by an ambition which is not necessarily to follow fashionable orientations. Our project is to establish long standing policies able to implement a progressive but radical change in universities strategies and provisions.

WE AGREE...

We necessarily agree with the general orientation of the document when it recalls and updates the aim for Europe: “to lead, compete and prosper as a knowledge-based, connected, greener and more inclusive economy, growing fast and sustainably, creating high levels of employment and social progress”.

We agree on the displayed priorities, in particular when the document:

- States that it is necessary to base growth on knowledge: knowledge is the engine for sustainable growth”, “in a fast-changing world what makes the difference is education and research, innovation and creativity”.
- Asks universities to become “true engine for knowledge and growth, that implies “closer co-operation with business” (but also with the society and the community in general) and adoption of “a more open attitude to change”
- Calls for “an efficient, effective and well resourced European Research Area”.

We fully agree with the analysis of the new emerging patterns which closely meet the elements of analysis that EUCEN has regularly developed in the recent years in several contributions and reports, as basis of its vision of lifelong learning in higher education.

We support the proposition of “rethinking education systems and labour markets” as a condition to maintain social cohesion and to avoid exclusion.

BUT, WE CONSIDER THAT...

First, the document is too deeply influenced by the recent economic crisis and its effects on the future economic and social development of Europe. Of course, this crisis limits now the

chances to reach the objectives and results that were expected a few years ago. Of course, this crisis limits our perspectives for the future. But there is no questioning on the origin and causes of this crisis. The document does not bring into questions what happened in the recent months. The crisis is presented as an event that happened to us unexpectedly. It seems a crisis without causes. And more or less the document proposes to continue on the same basis, as if nothing had happened. The main concession made to “modernity” is the reference to a “green” and “sustainable” development as a condition for our future prosperity.

For some of our members this crisis is due to a crisis of values. It is not only an economic crisis; it is also a crisis of our society. They insist on the fact that it is based on the lack of responsibility of a small number of actors, or groups of actors, encouraged by the absence of reaction of deciders causing huge damages for a large number of individual and collective actors. They regret that the document does not enough refer to values to be shared, or to values that we would encourage to be shared. Well being, social inclusion is not only based on “securing well performing labour markets”. We have probably to work on new references.

Second, this document does not take enough into account the fact that the Lisbon process has not been so successful. We have not reached the agreed objectives in particular in Education and Training 2010. Our analysis is that the investment and the co-operation of Member States have not been as high as it was expected during the period covered by the Lisbon process in particular in the field of lifelong learning. Even some progresses have been identified by the bi-annual progress reports on Education and Training 2010, member states have not really reoriented their educational systems in order to make possible a shift from traditional educational provisions to the combination of diverse learning opportunities that are more process and outcome oriented. And their answers to the benchmark proposed by the Commission (12.5% of the population aged 25-64 should participate in lifelong learning by 2010) are only based in most cases on adult education.

Third, this document expects from all member states the same level of commitment, of investment. We understand that it is a trend, a general objective for all, but we think that this perspective does not take enough into consideration the diversity and the inequities between countries, regions and institutions. Regarding higher education, it is evident that the competition opened between universities on a world basis is creating “world leagues” at different levels despite the efforts made by institutions and the heads and staff of these establishments. We think that it would be more efficient to take stock of this diversity and to invite these institutions to concentrate their efforts in the proposed general framework on specific objectives in line with their competences and resources. In addition, to invite European universities to challenge the best universities in the world could be counterproductive, the criteria chosen leading the universities to prioritise their own development, their own academic and research strategies, to partnerships with multinationals or companies calling for high level technologies, to the detriment of their contribution to their environment, to the regional development, to partnerships with small and medium enterprises. We think that sustainable development needs more attention in the involvement of the maximum of actors in the process and the establishment of “networked universities” contributing in the promotion, in synergy with other actors, of new activities closer to local stakeholders and populations.

NEVERTHELESS,...

We strongly support the new vision of lifelong learning introduced in the document of consultation underlining the new patterns emerging “where there are several entries in and exits from the labour market during a working life, instead of the traditional sequence (education, work, and retirement), offering more opportunities to people”. This obliges educational institutions and universities in particular to take care of these transition points and to elaborate new provisions lively to offer long term services to their alumni and flexible answers to people concerned. “Transition between jobs, between training and jobs will have to be managed”. Transition points are becoming the most important moments in the development of personal and professional pathways, “avoiding long term unemployment”, and educational institutions have to take into account what people have learnt from previous activities, assessing and validating this non formal and informal learning and opening new perspectives both on the basis of the results of this learning process and of the personal and professional project of the individuals, the opportunities that are offered to them, the new employments accessible,...But this approach must not be seen only from the employability perspective, also from the personal development and citizenship perspective. This is particularly crucial if we want to involve people meeting difficulties for social insertion or persons who are not inserted in the labour market: principally women at home and aged or retired people. The challenge in our societies is not only to face rapid changes in economy but also in social, community or family life.

We think that it is necessary to base the deep transformation for Europe on a wide definition of individual competence. Competences have not to be seen only from an economy-focussed vision. The role of universities:

- is not to provide adaptive answers to the demand expressed by companies but to guarantee the employability beyond immediate needs on the lifespan, to create more transversal and transferable skills;
- is not to give responses to specific demands but to open a wide range of opportunities to learners to make them able to face the needs of different scientific, organisational or technical environments, to create new activities, new companies or to become self-employed;
- is not to provide a limited horizon but to help learners not to be surprised by further scientific and technological developments;
- is not only to prepare persons who will contribute to the economy, but to help them to be active citizens, able to contribute to the democracy, to the development of the society, to positive human relationships.

We think that it is necessary to diversify the opportunities for early leaving learners, for drop out students, to multiply the chances to start or re-start a learning process on the basis of what people have learnt in non formal and informal settings. We have to re-think the role of educational institutions and of universities in particular to meet the needs of these specific populations, to take advantages of the diversity of participants and of an intergenerational learning.

We think that we have to take more into account the European tools and instruments which have been developed or promoted during the recent years. Validation of non formal and informal learning (common principles and now European guidelines) and focus on guidance and counselling are key tools if we want to provide relevant answers to individuals at

transition points. The preoccupation expressed by a lot of educators recommending a shift from a pedagogical approach based on programmes, contents and disciplines to learning outcomes, the promotion of units based programmes, the development of national qualifications frameworks linked to the European qualifications framework support this developmental conception of individual personal and professional pathways.

We regret the absence of recommendations for funding, for establishing new funding mechanisms. Such an approach has no chance to come to concrete expression if there is no revision of the funding mechanisms. Currently there is no integrated approach of funding. There are for the moment in member states separated answers provided by ministries of education, of labour or of social affairs or by companies or by individuals, each of them with specific conditions concerning awarding process, control and evaluation. How currently to mobilise different sources of financing at transition points? We call for recommendations to member states to set up new conceptions of funding taking into account the new needs appearing with the conception of lifelong learning embedded in the consultation document.

And finally, we call for a better identification of good practices, of experiments which are developed at local, regional, institutional level. This means probably to move along with “traditional” benchmarks towards the introduction of more qualitative benchmarks, to focus more on values, on sustainability and active citizenship. We observe that a lot of interesting and innovative experiments are developed in European countries, demonstrating encouraging ways of implementation of the approach that we try to promote, numerous European projects developed in the lifelong learning programme 2007-2013 provide elements of reflection, guides, and tools likely to help institutions as well as policy makers to come to concrete decisions. Reports elaborated by ministries rarely mention these contributions. So we call for frameworks inviting national authorities to report on qualitative developments. This is a condition to move from rhetoric to practice at institutional level.