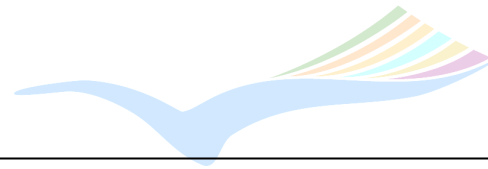


Odile Quintin, Director-General for Education and Culture, European Commission

"Thematic Forum: University-Business Cooperation", Dublin – 22 October 2009

Thematic Forum

Dublin – 22 October 2009



Education and Culture DG

(Check against delivery)

Minister O'Keefe, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here. To be back here in fact – just a couple of weeks ago, Minister O'Keefe and I, and many of your distinguished colleagues, celebrated an Irish milestone in European cooperation. No, I don't mean the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty ...

In fact, we were celebrating Ireland's pioneering work, as the first country to reference its national framework of qualifications to the European qualifications framework – a breakthrough I will come back to later.

I am sure today will be another memorable milestone; and I would like to thank Minister O'Keefe, the Department of Education and Science, the HEA and the Department for Employment and Learning of Northern Ireland, for helping us organise this event.

Since the Commission launched our University-Business forum in 2008, we have held several of these thematic forums in different parts of the Union. The mix of expertise – national experts from university and business worlds, plus the European dimension brought in by other speakers and participants – has sparked

some fascinating debates. At the next one, in the Czech Republic, we will look at how University-Business cooperation can aid recovery from the economic and financial crisis.

Surmounting the crisis through a partnership focused on skills

As the crisis has made absolutely clear, we live in an interdependent world. Ireland has been badly affected, but no part of Europe has escaped unscathed. No one country, or sector, can solve today's challenges alone.

This is as true of education as of any other aspect of our societies. Opening our schools, universities and training institutions to the wider world is a vital precondition for renewing our education systems and determining how far Europe reaches the knowledge society target.

We need more and better avenues of cooperation between higher education and business. We need information and knowledge to flow; to reinforce mutual understanding and develop trust and confidence between these two worlds.

The University-Business Forum is the Commission's very practical contribution - a platform for discussion, for exchanging good practice and for mutual learning.

This thematic forum on skills goes to the heart of this partnership. Everyone has a stake in the debate: universities, to make sure their graduates are well prepared for the labour market; companies, who are eager for highly qualified graduates with the right mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Not to speak of the graduates themselves and the benefits to society as a whole.

University-business cooperation is not something we should switch on in good times and switch off in harder ones. In fact, it is even more necessary at times like this: better links between university and business will bring them closer to

what society needs, and will render public investment in higher education and research more efficient.

We need to maintain a steady focus on education. Because the crisis makes the input of education, skills and innovation even more necessary than before: to help people through, holding on to and improving their skills, and to prepare for the opportunities that recovery will bring.

We need system change too. Over the longer term, education, training and skills are going to be crucial in shaping the future of our societies and our economies. Europe cannot compete on cost – we can only stay competitive by investing in our people and their capacity to innovate.

Thus, it is the societies that continue to value and invest in education that will be the best placed to make the best use of the opportunities that will arise post-crisis.

The right skills – New Skills for New Jobs

But this does not mean more of the same. If Europe is to create new enterprises and new jobs, we need to provide our young people with the new skills to match; and to help people already in work to upgrade their skills.

We need not only more skills, but the right skills. People will always need job-specific, technical knowledge and expertise. But work is changing. Routine tasks and hierarchies of command are disappearing. Organisations are flatter; work is more varied and individualised; and jobs are changing all the time. Increasingly, people need know-how and soft skills: creativity; communication; self-management; teamworking skills.

But the pace of change also makes it difficult to know precisely what direction jobs are taking. Too often there is a mismatch – between the knowledge and

skills being offered in education and training, and the needs of the people on the changing labour market. People, and the economy, are losing out. We need to better anticipate the changes so that we can equip people for jobs in the knowledge society.

This is the background to the Commission's initiative 'New skills for new jobs', the overall theme of this forum. You will discuss some of the key issues:

How can the university-business partnership help us identify and define the skills we need; and help to impart these skills in third-level education? And how can universities and business cooperate to galvanise regional development? This forum will help us define some of the practical ways in which university-business cooperation can focus on new skills at national and regional level.

European initiatives for improving the university-business partnership

For our part, New Skills for New Jobs is one of several European initiatives that identify university-business cooperation as a key resource in helping education and training provide the skills of tomorrow.

We are aiming to **improve our skills forecasting**; we are **analysing skills needs** by sector – with 16 covered to date; and will **mobilise Community policies and European funds** to help Member States and regions with their skills forecasting. University-business dialogue makes the forecasts more accurate.

With Ireland's National Skills Strategy examining these issues, too, our interlocking concerns will help us meet the challenge of upskilling Europeans for the demands of the future. We can help you define your skills needs; and we can learn from you, in turn.

As I mentioned, I was last in Dublin to celebrate the referencing of Ireland's NQF to the **European Qualifications Framework**. Put simply, these are frameworks that allow people from anywhere in Europe to map their qualifications in ways that are mutually understandable: in particular, by focussing on the learning outcomes achieved.

These frameworks not only help to bring down the borders that separate different national systems. By helping to dismantle the internal borders that still persist between different sectors of education, they allow people to put together a learning pathway that is flexible and lifelong, and make communication between education and business easier and clearer.

This partnership between education and business also underpins the EU's new flagship initiative, the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology**. The EIT is the first EU initiative to properly integrate education into the knowledge triangle. Universities, research bodies and business interests will join forces in Knowledge and Innovation Communities, to turn the latest knowledge and research into innovation products.

The EIT will not only be a magnet for talent. It will be a model for changing the relationship between education, research and innovation so that each ups its performance.

Conclusion

It is also my hope that the thematic forum will present us with new models for re-charging the relationship between business and universities. This is a two-way street, where the benefits are high for education and enterprises alike, and for the students who straddle both worlds.

I look forward very much to the discussions: the experiences you have had in Ireland are highly relevant to the debate. As an open economy, you have succeeded in attracting world-leaders in business, thanks to the high-quality education and training on which your strategy for the knowledge economy is built.

Although we are all battling with the multiple effects of the crisis, I am certain that the high skills which were central to the economic growth that Ireland has known until the current crisis will also be a staple of recovery.

Thank you.