

## **Workshop 1: Skills for the Future. Priorities at European level – today and for the future. *Martina Ní Cheallaigh, European Commission, DG EAC***

### **Today**

Since the 2000 Lisbon European Council, Member States recognise the importance of enhanced policy cooperation on the basis of common objectives. In particular, they committed themselves to developing and implementing national lifelong learning strategies by 2006. Most of the Member States, however, still have to achieve this goal.

At the policy level, The Lisbon agenda acknowledged education as a key dimension of the knowledge triangle with research and innovation. Working together the Member States and the Commission have set up an overarching European policy framework. Ministers for Education for the first time agreed on a common "Education and training 2010 work programme" based on the strategic goals set by the Lisbon European Council in 2000 and using a new working method, the "Open method of Coordination". It uses indicators and benchmarks - such as increasing the proportion of young people who complete upper secondary education - to measure progress, monitoring and reporting mechanisms and comparative tools for cooperation, such as peer learning activities..

Common principles, references and guidelines have been developed since 2000: for instance

- A European set of key competences for Lifelong learning that includes entrepreneurship, common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and common principles and tools for lifelong guidance.
- The European Union has also developed tools to remove obstacles to mobility, e.g. the European Quality Charter for Mobility and the 'single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences' called 'Europass'.
- Adoption of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is expected by the end of this year. The EQF will be a milestone in learner and worker mobility across Europe.

Major progress has been made also in the recognition of diplomas, in the promotion of multilingualism and in the use of information and Communication technologies for innovation and lifelong learning. All these concrete achievements have benefited Member States, social partners and other stakeholders, but most critically, citizens.

An important component of the Lisbon process is the enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET), the Copenhagen process. In December 2006, in their Helsinki Communiqué, the 33 countries now participating in the process and the European social partners agreed to continue the Copenhagen process, and to further develop the tools for enhancing the quality, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications. They emphasised the role of this process in highlighting the importance of VET, improving its visibility and inspiring national reforms. Participating countries have agreed to pay more attention to the image, status and attractiveness of VET. More emphasis will be placed on quality and good governance of VET systems and providers in delivering the VET agenda.

The development and implementation of common European tools is continuing in order to pave the way towards a European area of VET, to support the competitiveness of the European labour market, and to facilitate mobility of learners and workers. A public consultation on ECVET- a system for the accumulation and transfer of credit in VET – concluded on 31 March 2007. The results will be discussed at a conference to be held by the

German Presidency of the EU in Munich on 4-5 June 2007 and the outcomes will be worked into a draft Recommendation of the Council and Parliament. The European Network on Quality Assurance in VET now has 24 active members engaged in implementing the Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET.

The Copenhagen process fosters mutual learning. It supports European cooperation and allows the participating countries to consider their policies in light of experience from other countries. It provides a framework for working together, learning from others, sharing ideas, experience and results. The process seeks to strengthen the involvement of different stakeholders and enables their contribution to common goals. It places importance on the active participation of stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level in testing and implementing the common European tools for VET. A number of pilot projects are being financed through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme to test these tools.

The organisation of the first EuroSkills competition in Rotterdam, in September 2008, provides an excellent opportunity to raise awareness of the skills and competences attained through VET, and to inform young people and their parents of the careers this route opens to them.

On the programme side, Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci, were both re-launched for the period 2000-2006 and were used to finance projects and initiatives which supported the common policy objectives of the Education and Training 2010 work programme and the Copenhagen process. And in 2006, agreement was achieved on a single European action programme for lifelong learning for 2007-2013. This new programme (incorporating Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig and Jean Monnet) will - with an increased budget - help us foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the Community. The Leonardo da Vinci strand seeks to improve the quality and to increase the volume of mobility throughout Europe of people involved in initial vocational education and training and in continuing training, so as to increase placements in enterprises to at least 80 000 per year by the end of the Lifelong Learning Programme. Since one of the strategic goals is to make our systems more open, new programmes, such as Erasmus Mundus, have been created and cooperation agreements with industrialised countries have been signed (e.g. USA and Canada).

## **Future**

In the near future, we see the need for a debate at European level in further areas such as pre-school, school education and teacher training. We look forward to the establishment of the EIT which will bring together research, business and education at the highest level. In the mid- and long-term, our policy will face challenges, like globalisation, demographic change including an ageing European workforce and the need to upskill 80 million low-skilled adults in Europe. We also have to address the impact of migration, for example on language teaching and equal treatment.

Bearing in mind these challenges, future priorities must combine excellence, quality and efficiency with equity. Added attention must be paid to the role of education and training along with research and innovation in the knowledge triangle. More needs to be done to develop a culture of evidence, feedback and evaluation throughout Europe.