

3° Entrepreneurship Education High Level Reflection Panel – Prague 25-26 June 2009

- SUMMARY REPORT -

The third Entrepreneurship Education High Level Reflection Panel took place on 25-26 June 2009 at the Ministry of Education in Prague. Participants included representatives from the following countries: **Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Hungary** and **Poland** (with a representative from **Sweden** participating as an observer).

This initiative is jointly developed by the European Commission and national authorities as part of the implementation of the Small Business Act. This project is intended to help in increasing cooperation at all levels and in introducing more coherent and systematic strategies for the development of entrepreneurship education. The panel brought together national departments of education and enterprise, and some stakeholders proposed by relevant European organisations.

The current **split of responsibilities between ministries** differs from country to country, but there are some common trends. Ministries of education are responsible for the national curriculum and for education standards; organize training for teachers; sometimes they produce teaching material and organise support for specific programmes. Ministries of economy give input to lifelong learning strategies, in particular as concerns vocational education; they focus on start-ups, incubators and existing entrepreneurs; they may financially support external organisations that provide entrepreneurship education, and sometimes also the production of teaching material.

Cooperation between different departments and with stakeholders still needs to be improved in most countries, while in Austria this is already well established. In general where a “dual system” is in place such cooperation is well organised at least in the field of vocational education. In particular the importance of bringing entrepreneurs to the school as role models was highlighted. A good model of connecting education and enterprise is found for instance in Baden-Württemberg but also outside this regional cluster, i.e. the **education-business links** in the UK and in Ireland.

In all countries represented, entrepreneurship education tends either to be an objective within a broader strategy for lifelong learning (like in **Czech Republic** and **Hungary**) or to be part of a reform of the national curriculum. Such reform is ongoing in the **Czech Republic** and planned in **Poland**, where entrepreneurship is however already included in the national curriculum for all secondary schools. In **Austria** a national action plan is in preparation, with the objective of expanding entrepreneurship education and – in addition to vocational and commercial schools where it is already part of the curriculum - to include all types of secondary education. In **Germany** education policy is a responsibility of the different Länder. Most of them have a strategic approach to entrepreneurship in vocational education, and this is in some cases extended to general education as well (such as in Baden-Württemberg). However in all these countries there is a considerable autonomy at a local level, leading to much variation in the contents of education.

In general a common trend can be observed in the current shift of national curricula from contents to competences (like in **Austria, Czech Republic** and **Hungary**). This provides a new opportunity for entrepreneurship to be introduced in schools as a key competence.

It was however stressed that a formal presence in the national curriculum or in a national strategy is not sufficient in itself, and it will be very important to focus on concrete implementation. Common **challenges** in all these countries are: providing training to teachers; ensuring a broad participation of students; the involvement of business representatives in courses and activities.

Many new young **teachers** on entrepreneurship will be needed in the coming years. Moreover, where entrepreneurship is a cross-curricular principle, those teachers who teach other subjects (such as geography, etc.) often have not enough entrepreneurial knowledge and attitudes. Therefore in-service training must be available. In **Austria** a specific institute was created for teachers who do not come from economic studies, and also a Summer University for teachers has been launched.

Concerning the limited possibility for students to participate in entrepreneurship programmes, some delegates commented that only if entrepreneurship is introduced as a compulsory subject in the curriculum it will become possible to reach all students. The number of students involved is currently too small in most countries (for instance, 1,4% of secondary level students in the **Czech Republic**).

A broad definition of entrepreneurship (as in the 2006 EU Recommendation on Key Competences) was shared by all delegates. This also enables support from teachers, who generally agree with the importance of soft and social skills. In the implementation, it is therefore important to make a distinction between **soft** entrepreneurial skills (e.g. social skills and entrepreneurial attitudes) and **hard entrepreneurial skills** (e.g. drafting a business plan). However entrepreneurship education requires firstly a change in teaching methods (how to teach), and not simply a change in the contents of education. The main focus will shift during the educational path, from working mainly on the attitudes of pupils (e.g. creativity, team work, initiative) in kindergarten and in primary school, to providing practical experience of entrepreneurship in secondary and in tertiary education.

Among the most widely used and most effective **tools** to teach entrepreneurship, two practice-based programmes were mentioned in particular: practice firms and student mini-companies. Both types of programmes are mainly delivered and promoted by **non-governmental organisations and associations**, whose important role was highlighted in bringing informal education into the system. Also it was noted that sometimes the activities of such organisations had a more tangible impact than public strategies and curricular reforms had so far.

The topic was discussed whether entrepreneurship should be better introduced into curricula as **a cross-curricular principle or as an independent subject**. Both approaches are needed. In fact, where some broad elements of entrepreneurship are present in the national curriculum in a cross-curricular fashion (such as in **Hungary**), there is a perception that efficacy and impact would be improved by also adding a specialised subject in entrepreneurship. The trend observed is to teach basic and social skills through a cross curricular approach, and more specialised skills through an individual subject. In any case it was observed that the curriculum shouldn't be exceedingly rigid, so as to leave enough room for teachers to organise practical activities out of the established programmes.

Concerning the problem of funding, the specific availability of the **European Structural Funds** (especially the ESF) for promoting entrepreneurship education projects in all countries has been highlighted, and documented with the case presented by Baden-Württemberg.

Participants expressed their interest in other countries' good practices and plans. For instance, in preparing the new action plan for entrepreneurship education Austria is in contact with the administrations of Denmark, Norway and Sweden participating to the previous Panel. Many delegates, such as Poland, expressed a special interest in the strategic approach presented by Baden-Württemberg. This shows that there is a high potential for sharing experiences and ideas, and for working together at European level. Many participants indicated that they will use the results and findings from these High Level Reflection Panels, and are looking forward to the final report (which will be prepared by the Commission's consultant Ecotec).