

## Cooperation on policy issues

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Under the principle of **subsidiarity** every Member State of the European Union retains full responsibility for the content of teaching and the organisation of its own education system. In accordance with Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, the EU's role is to contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action. The main purpose of this is to develop the European dimension in education, encourage mobility and promote cooperation between schools and universities.

In keeping with these Articles, the European Union therefore does not intend to devise or implement a "**common policy**" on education. It nevertheless has specific ways of promoting cooperation in this field through action at European level:

firstly, EU action programmes like Socrates (for education) or Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational training), which stem from a European level co-decision between the Council and the European Parliament,

secondly, EU legislation promoting cooperation between the Member States on policy issues, such as recommendations, communications (e.g. on lifelong learning, on evaluating the quality of school and university education or on cooperation with non-Community countries), working documents, pilot projects, etc.

In the field of education and training, this form of **cooperation on policy issues** has been built up principally over the past few years, and in particular since the Lisbon European Council in March 2000. On that occasion, the European Union, in response to the challenges of globalisation and the information society, set out its new strategic objective for the coming decade, viz.: becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

This implies major changes, particularly efforts to **strengthen cooperation on education and training policy**. A detailed work programme on the future objectives of education and training systems has been prepared for this purpose. It will be implemented using the "open method of coordination" between Member States, which was also defined in Lisbon. This new instrument will hopefully pave the way for coherent policies in areas such as education where a "common policy" is not feasible but where there is a real need for a "European educational area". The Barcelona European Council (March 2002) underlined these ambitions by pointing out that education was one of the bases of the European social model and that Europe's education systems should become a "world quality reference" by 2010.

As a contribution towards this objective, education Ministers of 31 European countries (Member States, candidate countries and EEA countries) have adopted the **Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training** (30 November 2002). The declaration gives a mandate to develop concrete actions in the fields of transparency, recognition and quality in VET.

The momentum given to cooperation on education policy is also linked to the preparation for enlargement. The newly acceded countries (and those in the European Economic Area) are already taking part in the Leonardo and Socrates programmes and in the process of convergence towards a European area of higher education ("Bologna process"), as well as the follow-up to the Copenhagen declaration. Their involvement in the implementation of the "Detailed work programme on the future objectives of education and training systems" is thus one of the priorities on the agenda of ministerial meetings.

## Articles 149 and 150

### Article 149

1. The Community shall contribute to the **development of quality education** by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

2. **Community action** shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States;
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments;
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States;
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors;
- encouraging the development of distance education.

3. The Community and the Member States shall foster **cooperation with third countries** and the competent **international organisations** in the field of education, in particular the Council of Europe.

4. In order to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article, the Council:

- acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251, after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States;
- acting by a qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations.

### Article 150

1. The Community shall implement a **vocational training policy** which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training.

2. **Community action** shall aim to:

- facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining;
- improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market;
- facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people;
- stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms;
- develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States.

3. The **Community and the Member States** shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of vocational training.

4. The **Council**, acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251 and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt measures to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.

### **Detailed work programme on the future objectives of education and training systems**

In March 2000, the **Lisbon European Council** called on education ministers "to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity (...) and presenting a broader report to the European Council in the spring of 2001".

On the basis of a Commission proposal and contributions from the Member States, the Council adopted the "Report on the concrete future objectives of education systems" on 12 February 2001. It is the first document to set out a coherent overall approach to national education policies in the context of the EU on the basis of three objectives:

- improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union;
- making lifelong learning accessible to everyone;
- making our education and training systems more outward-looking as regards the rest of the world.

This report was approved in March 2001 by the Stockholm European Council, which asked that a detailed work programme be drawn up. This was adopted on 14 February 2002 (see press release) and was the subject of a joint report transmitted by the Commission and the Council to the Barcelona European Council on 15 and 16 March 2002.

### **Open method of coordination**

While respecting the breakdown of responsibilities envisaged in the treaties, this method provides a new cooperation framework for the Member States with a view to convergence of national policies and the attainment of certain objectives shared by everyone. It is based essentially on:

- identifying and defining jointly the objectives to be attained;
- commonly-defined yardsticks (statistics, indicators) enabling Member States to know where they stand and to assess progress towards the objectives set;
- comparative cooperation tools to stimulate innovation, the quality and relevance of teaching and training programmes (dissemination of "best practice", pilot projects, etc).

The Union must become the **most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy** in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (European Council, Lisbon, March 2000).

To achieve this ambitious goal, Heads of States and Government asked for "not only a radical transformation of the European economy, but also a challenging programme for the **modernisation of social welfare and education systems**". In 2002, they went on to say that by 2010, Europe should be the world leader in terms of the quality of its education and training systems.

Making this happen will mean a **fundamental transformation of education and training** throughout Europe. This process of change will be carried out in each country according to national contexts and traditions and will be driven forward by cooperation between Member States at European level, through the sharing of experiences, working towards common goals and learning from what works best elsewhere.

To ensure their contribution to the Lisbon strategy, Ministers of Education adopted in 2001 a **report on the future objectives of education and training systems** agreeing for the first time on shared objectives to be achieved by 2010. A year later, the Education Council and the Commission endorsed a **10-year work programme** to be implemented through the open method of coordination. Approved by the European Council, these agreements constitute the new and coherent Community strategic framework of co-operation in the fields of education and training.

Ministers of education agreed on three major goals to be achieved by 2010 for the benefit of the citizens and the EU as a whole:

- to improve the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems;
- to ensure that they are accessible to all;
- to open up education and training to the wider world.

To achieve these ambitious but realistic goals, they agreed on thirteen specific objectives covering the various types and levels of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal) aimed at making a reality of lifelong learning. Systems have to improve on all fronts: teacher training; basic skills; integration of Information and Communication Technologies; efficiency of investments; language learning; lifelong guidance; flexibility of the systems to make learning accessible to all, mobility, citizenship education, etc.

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**Working Groups** have each been working over the course of the last two years on one or more objectives of the work programme. Gathering experts from 31 European countries as well as stakeholders and interested EU and international organisations, their role is to support the implementation of the objectives for education and training systems at national level through exchanges of "good practices", study visits, peer reviews, etc. With the support of the **Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks** set up by the Commission in 2002, indicators and benchmarks are being developed to monitor progress.

"Education and Training 2010" integrates all actions in the fields of education and training at European level, including vocational education and training (the "**Copenhagen process**"). As well, the **Bologna process**, initiated in 1999 is crucial in the development of the European Higher Education Area. Both contribute actively to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives and are therefore closely linked to the "Education and Training 2010" work programme.

The European Commission adopted on 11 November 2003 a **Communication** presenting an interim evaluation of the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010" programme since Lisbon. This Communication calls for accelerated reforms in the years to come and a stronger political commitment to achieve the Lisbon goals. It constitutes the Commission's contribution to the **joint report** which the Education Council and the Commission submitted to the 2004 Spring European Council.

A key priority for the Commission now is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which the Commission formally published as a Staff Working Document on 8 July 2005.

The objective of the planned **EQF** is to facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individual citizens, by linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral levels and enabling them to relate to each other. The EQF will therefore act as a translation device and will be one of the principal European mechanisms intended to facilitate citizen mobility for work and study, alongside for example, Erasmus, the European Credit Transfer System and Europass.