



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education and vocational training; Coordination of Erasmus+
Vocational training and adult education; Erasmus+

ET 2020 WORKING GROUP ON ADULT LEARNING

REPORT OF FOURTH MEETING, 25-26 NOVEMBER 2014, BRUSSELS

Participants: see Annex 1

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this meeting were to:

- Adopt the report of the in-depth country specific workshop on Basic Skills (Stuttgart 27-29 October) and reflect on the findings of the seminar on AL Policy Coherence (23-24 November, Brussels)
- Discuss the final design and functionalities of the policy assessment tool that will be one deliverable of the study "Analysis of Adult Learning Policies and their Effectiveness in Europe"
- Receive an update and discuss the policy recommendations of the study on "Adult Learners in Digital Environment"
- Share experience and good practice in countries addressing challenges identified in Country Specific Recommendations
- Continue the process of shaping the Group's work programme, by planning the activities, among them in-depth country workshops on Digital tools and OER, to be undertaken in order to produce the outputs required by the end of the mandate

UPDATE ON LATEST POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Paul Holdsworth informed the WG that the Commission's unit for VET and AL Policy, with the majority of the colleagues from the current unit EAC B2, will from 1 January 2015, move to the DG for Employment and become unit EMPL C5. The part of unit EAC B2 unit dealing with Erasmus+ will remain in DG EAC, and there will continue to be close cooperation between the policy and the programme teams.

STUDY: ANALYSIS OF ADULT LEARNING POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN EUROPE - WORKSHOP

Mantas Sekmokas presented the state of play for the study 'An in-depth analysis of AL policies and their effectiveness in Europe'. After the online consultation carried out in

November, there remained issues regarding the appropriate standards of evidence and the 'building blocks' of the analytical framework to be discussed during the meeting.

Standards for evidence

Séin Ó Muineacháin and Shane Beadle (ICF) initiated the workshop by briefly presenting the criteria and standards for evidence used in the conceptual framework, and the generally supportive feedback on this received that had been received from the WG in the online consultation.

In a group session, WG members discussed the balance to be struck between ensuring that the conceptual framework is based on robust evidence and that the framework is of value to policy makers. WG members were asked **what evidence they would** use in developing policy initiatives in their country, what they would **do in the absence of evidence** and what **standards of evidence** they would value. WG members mostly expected the same sources of evidence as those used so far in the conceptual framework (especially evaluation of learners' benefits) and mentioned the need to triangulate multiple sources of evidence (qualitative and quantitative). When no evidence is available, WG members consult the relevant stakeholders, and/or seek inspiration from international best practice. They might also seek or commission new studies.

The WG agreed that while policymakers should aim to use evidence of the highest quality, this was not always available; in its absence, less rigorously supported evidence such as opinions should not be underestimated. Levels of evidence obviously vary, which is acceptable as long as the robustness of the evidence used is indicated. WG members also suggested that certain elements believed to capture crucial aspects of adult learning should be kept in the conceptual framework, even though there is, for the moment, low evidence to support them. Political challenges sometimes call for decision-making to be based on so called "common sense", and the retention of such policy actions in the framework might raise awareness of the need to collect new robust evidence in the future.

ICF recalled that some elements had been removed from the framework due to evidence that they were actually ineffective as components of AL policy.

Conceptual framework relevance

ICF gave an overview of the factors for successful policies that had been used in the conceptual framework revised in August, and findings from the case studies, further literature review and feedback from the online consultation on this. Group discussions followed, with the aim determining which 'building blocks' could be included in the framework despite the weaker evidence supporting them, and which building blocks should be reshaped. The discussion resulted in four areas being highlighted:

Inclusion of a building block focused on a **qualifications framework**. WG members especially emphasised the need to engage employers systematically e.g. by sector; they considered qualifications frameworks to be very important tools for learners and employers, even though all countries are not equally advanced in introducing them.

They also suggested merging the building blocks reflecting **employers' needs** and expanding this to include the role of civil society.

The need to reflect **the qualifications and conditions of the teaching workforce** was considered to be important, and WG members suggested including and reflecting the importance of initial teacher education and CPD.

WG members also insisted on preserving **a lifelong learning approach** by referring to the broad range of personal benefits of learning (beyond mere skills acquisition) and by enlarging the concept of skills to include transversal competences. Increased participation in lifelong learning for all learners (instead of solely the inactive and the unemployed) and monitoring should also be included.

Monitoring

The final part of the session aimed to encourage WG members to consider the availability of data to measure the effectiveness of AL policies. Six groups discussed the best choice of measure for the output of each of the key success factors (KSF) and the results were as follows.

KSF1: Improve learners' disposition towards learning

Possible ways to measure this could be to use participation rate as a proxy, or to undertake a poll measuring awareness of adult opportunities tracking the barriers.

KSF2: Use incentives to engage employers to invest in learning

CVTS and European Innovation Survey could be used, possibly with additional questions on skills of employees/unemployed, the offer of learning opportunities and their results.

KSF3: Increase equality of access for all

Participation rate would be the main measure here, backed up by other socio-economic factors. The title is a tautology, as equality implies access for all.

KSF4: Deliver learning that is relevant to employers and learners

CVTS could be useful. Learners and employers could be asked about their expectations after learning compared with before. Provision of WBL or non-formal learning could also be examined.

KSF5: Deliver high quality and effective AL

Qualitative variables should be used. A general remark was that there needs to be caution as quality systems are nationally focused.

KSF6: Coordinate AL policy with other public policies

The main variables suggested were qualitative and included assessing the level of cross-sectoral/ cross-departmental coordination, one-stop shops and alignment between top and bottom level.

The Commission explained that input from these discussions would be taken into consideration by the consultants and, together with findings from the literature review and case studies and feedback from the online consultation, would inform the finalisation of the framework, the tool and the final report of the study. The January meeting of the WG would be used to discuss the design of the tool. The final report will be available in February 2015. The tool and the report will contribute to the WG's output 2: A Guiding Framework focusing on the efficiency and effectiveness of policies, based on national good practice.

STUDY ON ADULT LEARNERS IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS – UPDATE

Angela Andersson presented suggested policy recommendations discussed during a seminar for High Level Experts in Brussels 6 November, that had been organised by the contractor as part of the study. Discussions in the seminar were informed by input from the WG's meeting in September and the country reviews carried out by the contractor.

Among the recommendations discussed by the High Level Experts, WG members agreed that policy recommendations around raising the **competencies of AL professionals** (e.g. through CPD), providing **support for learners** (especially low skilled) and **awareness-raising** for all citizens could be adequate as policy recommendations. **EU institutional strategies** (e.g. to extend EU funded ICT initiatives) could include **legal frameworks** to support the creation and sharing of Open Educational resources (OER). The issue of **ICT infrastructures** (e.g. wifi in public spaces) suggested by the WG in its September meeting, was not mentioned by the High Level experts in the seminar, but was once again highlighted by the WG.

Martina Ni Cheallaigh noted that some of these ideas could be kept in mind for the next Call for Proposals for National Coordinators of Adult Learning early in 2015 or for a Call for Proposals for Erasmus+ KA3 (policy experimentation) in 2016.

Suggested indicators for the self-assessment tool for providers will be uploaded on Yammer and a webinar will be organised for WG members who would like to engage further in the creation of the tool. The contractor (Ecorys) is still interested in receiving good practice examples of the use of OER and ICT-enhanced learning in AL for the providers' tool and the Handbook for policymakers.

IN-DEPTH COUNTRY WORKSHOPS

Effective policies for increasing the participation of adults in basic skills provision (Stuttgart, 26-29 October)

Norbert Lurz (DE) reported from the seminar on basic skills that took place in Stuttgart in October. Policies on adult basic skills were shared by the 12 participating countries who all contributed national or regional cases. The identification of factors for success in such policies proved useful, and participants appreciated in particular the possibility to reflect on possible future national initiatives.

The WG agreed that the country information sheets they had produced in preparation for the meeting are for internal use, and should only be shared outside the WG with the consent of the colleague concerned.

The report from the workshop, approved by the participants is published on Yammer and WG members would have until 5 December to make comments on it.

WG members were encouraged to share the report, once it had been adopted, with colleagues in their national networks.

Achieving policy coherence - how does it impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of adult learning policies? (Brussels, 23-24 October)

Aviana Bulgarelli (IT) reported from the seminar on policy coherence that had taken place in Brussels in the days preceding the WG meeting. Three country presentations (BE (Fr), NL

and PT) had provided a good picture of ways to ensure coherence between AL and other policy areas. The degree of centralisation, the approach, (top down or bottom up), the scope and level of stakeholder involvement and systems for monitoring and evaluating AL policies were key aspects. The topic had been introduced by JD Carpentieri, building on key findings of the country workshop in Stuttgart in October, which had identified policy coherence as a strong factor in effective policies. The report from the seminar would, after having been approved by the participants, be published on Yammer.

In-depth country workshop on ICT and OER (Oslo, Spring 2015)

As part of addressing its third policy challenge, "Analyse the current situation regarding the digital skills of adults and use if ICT and OER in adult learning and investigate ways to improve these", an in-depth country focus workshop would be hosted by Norway in Oslo 11-13 March 2015. A potential theme could be: "Digital competences for active citizenship and inclusion: tools and targets", and in addition to concrete policy cases the report from the Study on Adult Learners could provide input to the workshop. A planning group would be set up in December, to start preparing the programme and identify its policy focus and expected concrete outcomes.

EU2020: THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER 2014 AND COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

WG members reported on the analysis in their countries of AL-related CSRs. They identified three broad clusters of CSRs addressing: disadvantaged learners including migrants, labour market up- skilling and developing the AL sector within LLL.

The Group agreed that its activities in the three main strands of activity defined in the mandate, provide significant information and support to countries with a CSR. In addition, the studies on the effectiveness of AL policies and AL in digital environment both produce country-specific information which can be used by specific countries as needed. Taking into account these studies and the intensive peer learning work in country workshops, each of which involve country-specific work, the Group concluded that there is adequate support to countries with a CSR, but that it could provide more support, such as dedicated discussion groups on Yammer or webinars to clusters of countries, if required. The issue of providing assistance to clusters of Member States in responding to issues identified in the Country Specific Recommendations will be raised at coming meetings to capture such requests.

EPALE

Géraldine Libreau presented the EPALE online platform addressed to all stakeholders organising, funding or delivering AL. The platform aims to be a place to find ideas, resources, and information as well as to communicate with peers. EPALE is funded by Erasmus+ KA2 and since 1 October there are National Support Services, appointed by the national authorities, in most of the programme countries. The Commission invited WG members to spread information on EPALE, which will be officially launched in the spring 2015, in the AL community in their countries

CEDEFOP WORKING PAPER: RETURN TO WORK – WORK-BASED LEARNING AND REINTEGRATION OF UNEMPLOYED ADULTS INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

Alexandra Dehmel presented and distributed this policy handbook which is one of the EU-level deliverables agreed by Member States and the European Commission in the Bruges communiqué. Its purpose is to assist policy-makers, enterprises, social partners, training providers and other stakeholders to reinforce high-quality continuous vocational education and training (CVET) and to increase both access and participation. It provides policy guidance illustrated by concrete examples of effective practices from the Member States, which can serve as sources of motivation to promote CVET at national, regional and local levels.

Complementing this paper CEDEFOP will issue in 2015 a report on "CVET in Europe: the way ahead", one on WBL in CVET and one on job-related learning and VET in Europe. The Commission will upload the digital version of the handbook on Yammer, together with the results from the last CEDEFOP conference featured in Bruges.

EURYDICE REPORT: "AL AND TRAINING IN EUROPE: ADVANCING ACCESS TO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES"

Daniela Kocanova presented the study that started at the beginning of 2014 as a follow up of the 2011 study on AL formal education. The study covers 32 countries, and addresses 5 questions: top level authorities' commitment on basic skills, existing provision existing for disadvantaged learners, mechanisms facilitating their return to education and training, accompanying measures and the funding of provision. This is the first time that Eurydice has sought to describe systems of non-formal and informal learning; the study focussed on large scale publicly subsidised programmes.

NEXT STEPS

- The draft report from this meeting will be posted on Yammer for comments and for WG members to follow up in Member States
- The report from the Stuttgart workshop will be considered adopted by the WG if no further comments are received before 5 December.
- A report from the Bruges CEDEFOP workshops will be uploaded on Yammer
- The draft questions forming the self-assessment tool for AL providers being developed as a deliverable of the study on "Adult learners in a digital environment" will be uploaded on Yammer with an invitation to comment and submit good-practice cases. If requested, a webinar will be organized
- A planning group for the workshop in OER in Oslo will be established and more information, including a first invitations to express an interest in taking part will be posted on Yammer before the end of the year
- Documents related to the Study on policy effectiveness shared with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks will be uploaded on Yammer.

NEXT MEETING

20-21 January 2015