



Adult Learning Working Group Morning session – Implications of study

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This will briefly

- **Remind you of the purposes of the study**
- **Draw out the key results and key findings of the completed study**
- **Identify the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study**

The key aims and objectives of the study were

To create an **analytical tool**,

which would support Member States to **formulate and implement** effective AL policies, and

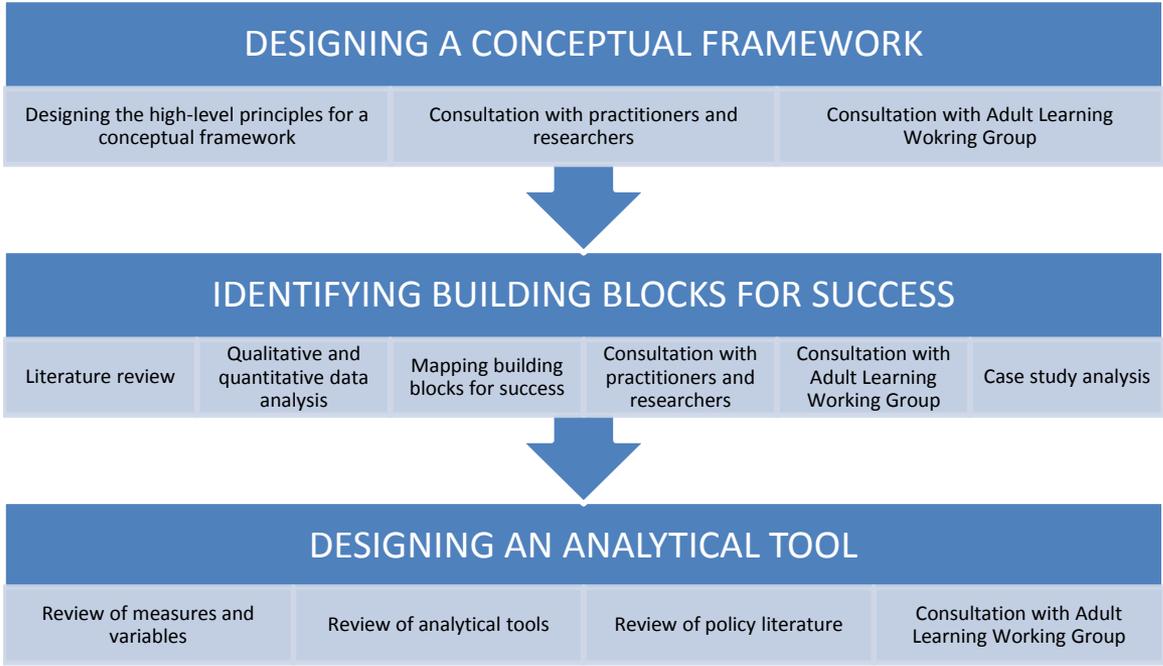
make **better use** of the existing evidence base.

To develop an analytical tool **bringing together existing data** on Adult Learning

Present the data and analysis in such a format so that it **clearly describes** the situation and challenges for policy makers, supporting the work of the ET2020 Working Group on AL

Carry out 10 country analyses and from all of these sources **extract a set of success factors** that underpin coherent policy in AL and its effective implementation.

This was the study process



Key innovations

- An empirical not a theoretical approach, to
- **Bridge the gap between statistics (“macro-level”), policies (“mezo –level”) and research (often “micro-level”) by building a common framework, based on:**
- An approach to building up and testing understanding in a variety of ways (consultation, discussion, case study evidence)
- Comprehensive review of existing literature
- Comprehensive review of European statistical data
- Development of a conceptual framework for effective AL policy
- An assessment of adult learning in EU based on the various sources

So what have we achieved so far which was not available?

- **An extensive international overview of the research evidence around all the policy actions believed to contribute to effective adult learning**
- **A broad analysis of all the statistical data and their usefulness as measures for monitoring change**
- **An assessment of AL in Europe; progress and challenges**
- **A conceptual framework for AL policy (which can be developed further)**
- **A clearer view of what is needed to improve policy effectiveness in AL**

These should be useful for the Commission and MS

- **Better understanding of AL policies that will increase effectiveness (and relationships between them)**
- **Better understanding of the state of evidence on all AL policy areas (quality, coverage, concerns, gaps)**
- **Identifying measures for monitoring success factors/policy areas which all can use (as well as gaps to be filled and measures to improve)**
- **Ability to carry out international and country level assessments**
- **A framework to guide policy discussions and decisions in OMC**

Key findings 1: policy actions which contribute to effective AL

- **Participation in learning is strongly linked to the availability of learning opportunities which governments fund in whole or part and the amount of government investment in learning**
- **Focusing investment on underrepresented groups in adult learning not only redresses the balance but increases overall adult participation in learning**
- **Provision of employment- and work-related training is a key driver in increasing the overall participation rate, not least because the majority of adults are in work**
- **Improving learners' disposition to learning increases participation in learning.**

This suggests that critical policy actions should be those which achieve the following:

- **Increasing the availability of learning (both formal and non-formal, both in work and out of work) and providing suitable opportunities for this for adults with a specific need (e.g. to re-skill or upskill) or an interest in learning**
- **Encouraging and enabling access to adult learning by adults who do little or no learning**
- **Increasing the motivation of employers to train and develop their employees as well as adults themselves to take up opportunities to learn which are available.**

Key findings II: challenges facing AL to achieve ET2020 and more

For some of the critical outputs of adult learning, it is clear that progress is being made in relation to:

- The levels of adults' participation in learning in many but by no means all countries;
- Raising the literacy and numeracy of young people compared to the older generations (though this can be partly attributed to school education);
- Maintaining the literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills of adults as they grow older in some countries where the level achieved by older adults are not much lower than younger adults;
- Increasing adults' qualification levels in most countries.

But further progress is needed to:

- Increase overall levels of participation and reverse the falls in some countries that could be linked to funding and the economic downturn;
- Reduce the proportions of adults with poor literacy and numeracy, especially older adults who can expect to remain in the workforce for longer;
- Achieve a consistent reduction in the number of adults with ISCED 0-2 highest qualifications across all age groups; a few countries are not seeing reductions among those aged 25-34.

So the challenges are

European level

- Reducing the large degrees of variation in inputs and outputs between countries
- Increasing the participation rates of adults in some countries to the levels in others
- Increasing the extent that inactive, older and less skilled people take part in education and training to the level achieved by younger and more qualified people (reducing the gaps)
- Providing training for those in work as much as for those who are unemployed
- Reducing the gap in competences between age groups in all countries analysed (this gap is particularly large for problem solving in technology-rich environments)
- Increasing the qualification levels of adults throughout their working lives

Member States

- Few, if any, have all the building blocks for success
- Most countries have challenges in relation to at least one critical output, many countries have challenges in relation to several critical outputs, and all countries appear to have a challenge in relation to success factor 3 (equity of access)
- The drivers of adult learning policy actions are largely economic: adult learning is recognised as a means of reducing unemployment and skills gaps and shortages by adapting the skills of the economically active

As a consequence it could be argued that:

- There are critical weaknesses in policy around training for low skilled and unemployed adults and the improvement of adults' basic skills
- Improving equity would increase participation and address low skills
- Priorities must continue to be: funding opportunities for adult learning, for both the employed and unemployed and, by extension, development of policy actions to make this effective

Key findings III: AL policy implementation can be improved

- **Evaluation of policy actions and the publication of evaluation reports very variable (to build evidence base); monitoring not commonplace either**
- **Low quality of evaluation of outcomes and impacts of AL policy actions (to improve quality of evidence base)**
- **Adult learning policies not well aligned with other government policies and strategies to ensure maximum effectiveness; better outcomes where they are coordinated at national and at sub-national levels**
- **Data to assess and review progress of policy actions not available in all countries or a limited range**

Key Conclusions

- **There is a substantial evidence base on the effectiveness of AL policies BUT it is still limited in coverage and quality**
- **There is a substantial statistical base for the monitoring of AL policies BUT there is infrequent updating, changing definitions and limited coverage of policy actions**
- **The EU and all MS face some challenges with AL as well as with AL policy design and implementation at national/regional/local levels**
- **The results of this study and the analytical tool can provide advice and guidance on AL policy effectiveness at EU/MS levels BUT improving the evidence base by evaluating and monitoring policies would help considerably in making the tool more effective and valuable**

Recommendations for the Commission and MS

- **Making full use of the evidence base and the framework in policy making, to:**
 - Comparative monitoring (compare between countries)
 - Comprehensive monitoring; (compare between policy areas)
 - More informed selection, design and implementation of policies
- **Importantly – to increasing the availability of data and evaluation to measure and compare **implementation (progress), quality and impact of policies****
- **Improving the **overall** evidence base (**research and statistics**)**
- **Updating the framework and improving its power**
- **Addressing the specific policy challenges identified**

