



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



## **Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020")**

*2941th EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CULTURE Council meeting  
Brussels, 12 May 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

the endorsement by the March 2002 Barcelona European Council of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme which - in the context of the Lisbon Strategy - established for the first time a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, based on common objectives and aimed primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU-level tools, mutual learning and the exchange of good practice via the open method of coordination;

and ACKNOWLEDGING

that cooperation under the aforementioned work programme, including the Copenhagen process and initiatives in the context of the Bologna process, have led to significant progress being made - notably in support of national reforms of lifelong learning, the modernisation of higher education and the development of common European instruments promoting quality, transparency and mobility - but that substantial challenges still remain, if Europe is to achieve its ambition to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world;

# **P R E S S**

EMPHASISES that

1. Education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens today and in the years ahead.
2. Efficient investment in human capital through education and training systems is an essential component of Europe's strategy to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie at the heart of the Lisbon strategy, at the same time as promoting personal fulfilment, social cohesion and active citizenship.

RECOGNISES that

1. While valuing European diversity and the unique opportunities which this affords, and while fully respecting the Member States' responsibility for their education systems, an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training - building on the progress made under the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme - could further enhance the efficiency of such cooperation and provide continuing benefits and support for Member States' education and training systems up to the year 2020.
2. Education and training have made a substantial contribution towards achieving the long-term goals of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. In anticipation of future developments with this process, efforts should therefore be maintained to ensure that education and training remain firmly anchored in the broader strategy. It is also essential that the framework for European cooperation should remain flexible enough to respond to both current and future challenges, including those arising under any new strategy after 2010.

NOTES WITH INTEREST

the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training*<sup>1</sup>.

AGREES that

1. In the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:
  - (a) the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens;
  - (b) sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.
2. Such aims should be viewed in a worldwide perspective. Member States acknowledge the importance of openness to the world at large as a prerequisite for the global development and prosperity which - through the provision of excellent and attractive education, training and research opportunities - will help the European Union achieve its objective of becoming a world-leading knowledge economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Doc. 17535/08 + ADD 1 + ADD 2

3. European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020 should be established in the context of a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective. Indeed, lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts - whether formal, non-formal or informal - and at all levels: from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning.

Specifically, the framework should address the following four strategic objectives (detailed further below):

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
  2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
  3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
  4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.
4. The periodic monitoring of progress towards a set objective provides an essential contribution towards evidence-based policy making. The strategic objectives outlined above should accordingly be accompanied during the period 2010 - 2020 by indicators and by reference levels for European average performance ("European benchmarks"), as set out in Annex I to this document. Building on the existing benchmarks, these will help to measure at European level the overall progress made and to show what has been achieved.

#### ■ **Strategic objective 1: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality**

The challenges posed by demographic change and the regular need to update and develop skills in line with changing economic and social circumstances call for a lifelong approach to learning and for education and training systems which are more responsive to change and more open to the wider world. While new initiatives in the field of lifelong learning may be developed to reflect future challenges, further progress with ongoing initiatives is still required, especially in implementing coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies. In particular, work is needed to ensure the development of national qualifications frameworks based on relevant learning outcomes and their link to the European Qualifications Framework, the establishment of more flexible learning pathways - including better transitions between the various education and training sectors, greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning, and increased transparency and recognition of learning outcomes. Further efforts are also required to promote adult learning, to increase the quality of guidance systems, and to make learning more attractive in general - including through the development of new forms of learning and the use of new teaching and learning technologies.

As an essential element of lifelong learning and an important means of enhancing people's employability and adaptability, mobility for learners, teachers and teacher trainers should be gradually expanded with a view to making periods of learning abroad - both within Europe and the wider world - the rule rather than the exception. In so doing, the principles laid down in the European Quality Charter for Mobility should be applied. To achieve this will require renewed efforts on the part of all concerned, for instance with regard to securing adequate funding.

## ■ **Strategic objective 2: Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training**

High quality education and training systems which are both efficient and equitable are crucial for Europe's success and for enhancing employability. The major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences by everyone, while developing the excellence and attractiveness at all levels of education and training that will allow Europe to retain a strong global role. To achieve this on a sustainable basis, greater attention needs to be paid to raising the level of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, making mathematics, science and technology more attractive and to strengthening linguistic competences. At the same time, there is a need to ensure high quality teaching, to provide adequate initial teacher education, continuous professional development for teachers and trainers, and to make teaching an attractive career-choice. It is also important to improve the governance and leadership of education and training institutions, and to develop effective quality assurance systems. High quality will only be achieved through the efficient and sustainable use of resources - both public and private, as appropriate - and through the promotion of evidence-based policy and practice in education and training.

## ■ **Strategic objective 3: Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship**

Education and training policy should enable all citizens, irrespective of their personal, social or economic circumstances, to acquire, update and develop over a lifetime both job-specific skills and the key competences needed for their employability and to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Educational disadvantage should be addressed by providing high quality early childhood education and targeted support, and by promoting inclusive education. Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners - including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants - complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning. Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.

## ■ **Strategic objective 4: Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training**

As well as engendering personal fulfilment, creativity constitutes a prime source of innovation, which in turn is acknowledged as one of the key drivers of sustainable economic development. Creativity and innovation are crucial to enterprise development and to Europe's ability to compete internationally. A first challenge is to promote the acquisition by all citizens of transversal key competences such as digital competence, learning to learn, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness. A second challenge is to ensure a fully functioning knowledge triangle of education-research-innovation. Partnership between the world of enterprise and different levels and sectors of education, training and research can help to ensure a better focus on the skills and competences required in the labour market and on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in all forms of learning. Broader learning communities, involving representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted with a view to creating a climate conducive to creativity and better reconciling professional and social needs, as well as individual well-being.

FURTHER AGREES that

1. In endeavouring to achieve the above strategic objectives and thereby ensure an effective contribution to national reforms, the following principles should be observed in the period up to 2020:
  - (a) European cooperation in education and training should be implemented in a lifelong learning perspective making effective use of the open method of coordination (OMC) and developing synergies between the different education and training sectors. While fully respecting Member States' responsibility for their educational systems and the voluntary nature of European cooperation in education and training, the OMC should draw on:
    - the four strategic objectives for European cooperation outlined above;
    - common reference tools and approaches;
    - peer learning and the exchange of good practice, including the dissemination of outcomes;
    - periodic monitoring and reporting;
    - evidence and data from all relevant European agencies<sup>2</sup>, European networks, and international organisations<sup>3</sup>;
    - making full use of the opportunities available under Community programmes, particularly in the field of lifelong learning.
  - (b) European cooperation in education and training should be pertinent and concrete. It should produce clear and visible outcomes which should be presented, reviewed and disseminated on a regular basis and in a structured manner, thereby establishing a basis for continuous evaluation and development.
  - (c) The Copenhagen process in the field of vocational education and training is an important aspect of European cooperation under the open method of coordination. The aims and priorities pursued under this process should contribute to achieving the objectives set out in this framework.
  - (d) In order to support Member States' efforts to modernise higher education and develop a European Higher Education Area, close synergy with the Bologna process should also be aimed for, in particular with regard to quality assurance, recognition, mobility and transparency instruments.
  - (e) Where relevant, cross-sectoral cooperation should be sought between EU initiatives in education and training and those in related policy areas - particularly employment, enterprise, social policy, youth policy and culture. With specific regard to the knowledge triangle, special attention should be paid to the synergies between education, research and innovation, as well as to complementarity with the aims of the European Research Area.

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, Cedefop and the European Training Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> **N.B. Whenever reference to the OECD is made or implied in this text, it is to be understood that the right of participation of all Member States in the work of that organisation should be ensured.**

- (f) Well-functioning cooperation using new, transparent ways of networking is needed not only between the relevant EU institutions, but also with all relevant stakeholders, who have a considerable contribution to make in terms of policy development, implementation and evaluation.
  - (g) Policy dialogue with third countries and cooperation with international organisations should be reinforced, thereby providing a source of fresh ideas and comparison.
  - (h) Where appropriate, financial resources from the European Structural Funds may be used to enhance education and training systems in accordance with the overall strategic objectives and Member States' priorities.
2. The success of the open method of coordination in education and training depends on the political commitment of Member States and on effective working methods at European level. From this perspective, and with a view to greater flexibility, the working methods used in the context of European cooperation should be based on the following:
- (a) *Work cycles*: the period up to 2020 will be divided up into a series of cycles, with the first cycle covering the 3 years from 2009 to 2011.
  - (b) *Priority areas*: for each cycle, a number of priority areas for European cooperation based on the strategic objectives will be adopted by the Council on the basis of a Commission proposal. The European priority areas will be designed to allow either for broad cooperation between all the Member States or for closer cooperation between a more limited number of Member States, in accordance with national priorities. The priority areas for the first cycle under this new framework are set out in Annex II hereto.
  - (c) *Mutual learning*: European cooperation in the aforementioned priority areas can be carried out by such means as peer learning activities, conferences and seminars, high level fora or expert groups, panels, studies and analyses and web-based cooperation and, where appropriate, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders. All of these initiatives should be developed on the basis of clear mandates, time schedules and planned outputs to be proposed by the Commission in cooperation with the Member States (see also paragraph (f) below).
  - (d) *Dissemination of results*: to enhance visibility and impact at national and European level, the outcomes of cooperation will be widely disseminated among all relevant stakeholders and, where appropriate, discussed at the level of Directors-General or Ministers.
  - (e) *Progress reporting*: At the end of each cycle - and in the case of the first under the new framework, no earlier than the beginning of 2012 - a joint Council-Commission report should be drawn up. This will evaluate the overall progress in achieving the objectives under this framework during the most recent cycle and/or in a particular thematic area which would be defined by the Commission in cooperation with the Member States (see also paragraph (f) below). Joint reports should be based on national reports drawn up by the Member States, as well as on existing information and statistical data. The joint reports may be developed to include factual analyses of the different situations in individual Member States, with their full agreement. The joint reports should also serve as the basis for establishing a fresh set of priority areas for the following cycle.

- (f) *Monitoring of the process*: To promote the delivery of results through the open method of coordination as well as ownership of the method at both national and European level, the Member States and the Commission will work closely together in steering, taking forward and evaluating the process and its outcomes.
3. The strategic framework - including benchmarks and working methods - may be reviewed and any necessary adjustments made by the Council in the light of any major new developments in Europe, particularly decisions taken on the EU strategy for growth and jobs beyond 2010.

ACCORDINGLY INVITES THE MEMBER STATES to

1. Work together, with the support of the Commission and using the open method of coordination as outlined in these conclusions, to enhance European cooperation in education and training in the period up to 2020 on the basis of the four strategic objectives, the principles and working methods described above, and of the priority areas agreed for each cycle (those for the first cycle 2009-2011 being outlined in Annex II hereto).
2. Consider, on the basis of national priorities, the adoption of measures at national level aimed at achieving the objectives outlined in the strategic framework and contributing to the collective achievement of the European benchmarks identified in Annex I hereto. Further consider whether inspiration can be drawn from mutual learning at European level, when devising national education and training policies.

INVITES THE COMMISSION to

1. Work with and support the Member States - during the period up to 2020 - in cooperating within this framework on the basis of the four strategic objectives, the principles and working methods described above, and the benchmarks and agreed priority areas outlined respectively in Annexes I and II hereto.
2. Examine, in particular through the joint progress reports, the degree to which the objectives of this framework have been met. In addition, conduct an evaluation during 2010 of the progress made in achieving the benchmarks adopted under the "Education and Training 2010" work programme.
3. Conduct work on proposals for possible benchmarks in the areas of mobility, employability and language learning, as indicated in Annex I hereto.
4. Work with the Member States to examine how to improve existing indicators, including those on early leavers from education and training, and report back to the Council by the end of 2010 on the extent to which the coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks adopted by the Council in May 2007<sup>4</sup> might be adjusted, so as to ensure its coherence with the strategic objectives under this framework. In this context, special attention should be paid to the areas of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

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<sup>4</sup> Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training [OJ C 311, 21.12.2007, pp. 13-15.]

**Reference levels of European average performance**  
**("European benchmarks")**

As a means of monitoring progress and identifying challenges, as well as contributing to evidence-based policy making, a series of reference levels of European average performance ("European benchmarks") should support the strategic objectives outlined in the above conclusions for the period 2010 - 2020.

These benchmarks build on the existing ones<sup>5</sup> adopted under the "Education and Training 2010" work programme. They should be based solely on comparable data and take account of the differing situations in individual Member States. They should not be considered as concrete targets for individual countries to reach by 2020. Rather, Member States are invited to consider, on the basis of national priorities and whilst taking account of changing economic circumstances, how and to what extent they can contribute to the collective achievement of the European benchmarks through national actions.

On this basis, the Member States agree to the following five benchmarks:

*Adult participation in lifelong learning*

With a view to increasing the participation of adults in lifelong learning, particularly that of the low-skilled:

- § By 2020, an average of at least 15 % of adults should participate in lifelong learning<sup>6</sup>.

*Low achievers in basic skills*

With a view to ensuring that all learners attain an adequate level of basic skills, especially in reading, mathematics and science:

- § By 2020, the share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science<sup>7</sup> should be less than 15%.

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<sup>5</sup> Council conclusions of 5-6 May 2003 on reference levels of European average performance in education and training (Benchmarks) (doc. 8981/03).

<sup>6</sup> i.e. The percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training during the 4 weeks prior to the survey (Eurostat/Labour Force Survey). Benefit can also be drawn from the information on adult participation in lifelong learning gathered by the Adult Education Survey .

<sup>7</sup> Source: OECD/PISA. (The right of participation of all Member States in such work should be ensured.)  
The relevant indicators will be monitored separately.

### Tertiary level attainment

Given the increasing demand for higher education attainment, and whilst acknowledging the equal importance of vocational education and training:

- § By 2020, the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment<sup>8</sup> should be at least 40%.

### Early leavers from education and training

As a contribution to ensuring that a maximum number of learners complete their education and training:

- § By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training<sup>9</sup> should be less than 10%.

### Early childhood education

With a view to increasing participation in early childhood education as a foundation for later educational success, especially in the case of those from disadvantaged backgrounds:

- § By 2020, at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.

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In addition, the Council invites the Commission to work further in the following areas:

### Mobility

Given the widely acknowledged added value of learning mobility, and with a view to increasing such mobility, the Commission is invited to submit to the Council a proposal for a benchmark in this area by the end 2010, focusing initially on physical mobility between countries in the field of higher education, taking both quantitative and qualitative aspects into account and reflecting the efforts made and the objectives agreed within the Bologna process, as highlighted most recently at the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve conference<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, the Commission is invited to study the possibility of extending such a benchmark to include vocational education and training and teacher mobility.

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<sup>8</sup> i.e. The percentage of those aged 30-34 who have successfully completed tertiary level education (ISCED levels 5 and 6). (EUROSTAT, UOE).

<sup>9</sup> i.e. The share of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training. (EUROSTAT/Labour Force Survey). Efforts should be made to improve the quality of data, including by examining the feasibility of using additional data sources.

<sup>10</sup> Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la Neuve, Belgium, 28-29 April 2009.

### Employability

Given the importance of enhancing employability through education and training in order to meet current and future labour market challenges, the Commission is invited to submit to the Council a proposal for a possible European benchmark in this area by the end of 2010.

### Language learning

In view of the importance of learning two foreign languages from an early age, as highlighted in the March 2002 Barcelona European Council conclusions, the Commission is invited to submit to the Council – by the end of 2012 - a proposal for a possible benchmark in this area, based on the ongoing work on language competences.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Council conclusions on the European Indicator of Language Competence (OJ C 172, 25.7.2006, p. 1).

**PRIORITY AREAS FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING DURING THE FIRST CYCLE: 2009 - 2011**

With a view to achieving the four strategic objectives under the "ET 2020" framework, the identification of priority areas for a specific work cycle should improve the efficiency of European cooperation in education and training, as well as reflect the individual needs of Member States, especially as new circumstances and challenges arise.

The priority areas, as referred to in paragraphs 2(b) and 2(c) in the "further agrees" section above and detailed below, reflect the need to:

- (i) pursue cooperation in areas where key challenges remain;
- (ii) develop cooperation in areas regarded as particularly important during this particular work cycle.

Member States will select, in accordance with national priorities, those areas of work and cooperation in which they wish to participate in joint follow-up work. If Member States deem necessary, the work on specific priority areas can continue in subsequent work cycles.

***Strategic objective 1: Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality:***

**Pursue work on :**

- **Lifelong learning strategies:** Complete the process of implementation of national lifelong learning strategies, paying particular attention to the validation of non-formal and informal learning and guidance.
- **European Qualifications Framework:** In accordance with the April 2008 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>12</sup>, relate all national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, and support the use of an approach based on learning outcomes for standards and qualifications, assessment and validation procedures, credit transfer, curricula and quality assurance.

**Develop cooperation on :**

- **Expanding learning mobility:** Work together to gradually eliminate barriers and to expand opportunities for learning mobility within Europe and worldwide, both for higher and other levels of education, including new objectives and financing instruments, and whilst taking into consideration the particular needs of disadvantaged persons.

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<sup>12</sup> OJ C 111, 6.5.2008.

***Strategic objective 2: Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training:***

**Pursue work on :**

- **Language learning:** To enable citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue, promote language teaching, where relevant, in VET and for adult learners, and provide migrants with opportunities to learn the language of the host country.
- **Professional development of teachers and trainers:** Focus on the quality of initial education and early career support for new teachers and on raising the quality of continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, trainers and other educational staff (e.g. those involved in leadership or guidance activities.).
- **Governance and funding:** Promote the modernisation agenda for higher education (including curricula) and the quality assurance framework for VET, and develop the quality of provision, including staffing, in the adult learning sector. Promote evidence-based policy and practice, placing particular emphasis on establishing the case for sustainability of public and, where appropriate, private investment.

**Develop cooperation on :**

- **Basic skills in reading, mathematics and science:** Investigate and disseminate existing good practice and research findings on reading performance among school pupils and draw conclusions on ways of improving literacy levels across the EU. Intensify existing cooperation to improve the take-up of maths and science at higher levels of education and training, and to strengthen science teaching. Concrete action is needed to improve the level of basic skills, including those of adults.
- **"New Skills for New Jobs":** Ensure that the assessment of future skill requirements and the matching of labour market needs are adequately taken on board in education and training planning processes.

***Strategic objective 3: Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship:***

**Pursue work on :**

- **Early leavers from education and training:** Strengthen preventive approaches, build closer cooperation between general and vocational education sectors and remove barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training.

**Develop cooperation on :**

- **Pre-primary education:** Promote generalised equitable access and reinforce the quality of provision and teacher support.
- **Migrants:** Develop mutual learning on best practices for the education of learners from migrant backgrounds.
- **Learners with special needs:** Promote inclusive education and personalised learning through timely support, the early identification of special needs and well-coordinated services. Integrate services within mainstream schooling and ensure pathways to further education and training.

***Strategic objective 4: Enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training:***

**Pursue work on :**

- **Transversal key competences:** In accordance with the December 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>13</sup>, take greater account of transversal key competences in curricula, assessment and qualifications.

**Develop cooperation on :**

- **Innovation-friendly institutions:** Promote creativity and innovation by developing specific teaching and learning methods (including the use of new ICT tools and teacher training).
- **Partnership:** Develop partnerships between education and training providers and businesses, research institutions, cultural actors and creative industries, and promote a well-functioning knowledge triangle.

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<sup>13</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.