

PREAMBLE

We, the major European Stakeholders in Education, Training and Youth, believe that the necessary transformation of national education and training systems and development of educational networks can only be achieved by European cooperation which is a prerequisite of realising a knowledge based society. EU programmes should aim to support organisations and individual learners in building the Europe-wide learning space step by step. This Area should aim at making lifelong learning a reality for all its citizens.

The current programmes are crucial for millions of learners and educators in Europe. They benefit from a wide recognition but their impact remains limited due to scarce resources. With the adoption of the “EU2020 strategy”, education and training is at the heart of the European project. Community programmes represent a real added value in reaching these objectives. The next generation should thus have the means to contribute to these objectives notably in terms of equal access to lifelong learning (accessing the formal system but also developing access to non-formal and informal learning). To reach “EU2020” targets it is crucial that the EU and its Member states consider investing in people as a top priority in the next financial perspectives.

We welcomed the broad consultation launched by the European Commission in preparation of the future of the Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action in 2010. This vision paper is a logical next step in this process as through our networks several hundred million learners and educators engage with the EU to develop the next generation of EU programmes.

VISION ON THE FUTURE OF THE EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH PROGRAMMES

The programmes should be ambitious with clear aims and focus on those areas where they can make a difference. They should not try to do everything and to address all European challenges. We believe that their main aim is to support the construction of a European Education Area as a crucial step to reaching the objectives of “EU2020”. It needs to be done by adopting a holistic vision of education and training that puts at a same level of esteem various ways of accessing learning be it formal, non-formal or informal. They would provide opportunities for people to acquire transversal competences for life such as creativity, intercultural dialogue, active citizenship or entrepreneurship. They shall be inclusive and support a strong European civil society.

In order to have the most effective and European added-value programmes for inclusive society through smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, we recommend that the next generation of EU programmes be based on the following key principles:

1/ Promoting a Holistic Vision of Learning

The programmes should be based on a holistic vision of learning, providing means to develop competences throughout life. They should aim at bringing different providers from various sub-sectors¹ together to gain added-value not only from mobility but also from sharing practices and building policy options. Transforming the general attitude of European citizens to be open to development and learning is a high target that will require coordinated actions. Programmes should not only be about “new skills for new jobs” but also about new ways of participation in society. Indeed, acquiring and improving skills, knowledge and competences goes beyond the sole aim of improving employability and encompasses developing active citizenship and social cohesion.

2/ Ensuring an Equal Access for All

The programmes should be for all learners (from early childhood to seniors), regardless of their social or geographic background. This requires a specific financial support to enable socially excluded groups to participate and to ensure the dignity of those undergoing mobility (i.e. proper financial support and mentoring). Such access should also be made possible in third countries and especially in neighbouring states. Transnational experience should be seen as an effective way to connect possible future members and partners of the EU. The programmes should be open to their participation.

3/ A Learner-centred perspective

The programmes should support actions that are learner-centred: actions supporting individuals’ needs and involving them actively in the learning process. The goal is to prepare them to steer their own learning pathway and become lifelong learners. According to each specific target group or situation, different solutions may be implemented by different type of actors. To foster innovation, it is essential to enable enough flexibility and encourage partnerships. The programmes should thus support projects based on “real-life” to achieve common European goals. They should aim at an increased permeability between the various sub-sectors. The diversity of our education and training systems can thus become a great asset to foster innovation.

¹ Adult education, vocational education and training, non-formal education / popular education, higher education, etc.

4/ A participative approach

Learners and educators from the various fields of education and training should be involved to co-decide on issues and programmes targeting them. This means that project proposals should plan a methodology on how to involve learners in the process. This participative approach needs to be a pillar of all programmes for education, training and youth. Furthermore, at the programme level, this participative approach should be developed into a structured dialogue with education and training stakeholders (including civil society organisations), Member States and the EU Institutions.

STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAMMES

We believe that the different programmes should not be merged but more flexibility and opportunities should allow linkages between the different sub-actions and programmes. The four key principles raised above thus find the following translation in terms of structure and management:

1/ Flexible programmes

Today the Lifelong Learning Programme is organised by sectors and it is not easy to link actions between these sub-programmes and with other programmes such as Youth in Action or Europe for Citizens. It is essential to support innovative projects that are transversal and include various actors. Allowing better flexibility can be achieved with new transversal actions and with common application forms, deadlines and priorities. This would be an asset in reaching the overall objective of making lifelong learning a reality for all in Europe and would put political goals into practice. EU programmes should set common political priorities but leave room for organisations to justify the most effective way to reach them (not limiting them to very specific types of actions or actors).

2/ Administrative simplification

If we want the programmes to target all EU citizens regardless of their social or geographic background, they should become user-friendly. Building an application today is very complicated and most of the time limited to “professionals of Europe” or to privileged individual learners. It is urgent that the EU takes into account the various proposals² made by civil society organisations to simplify the administrative and financial burdens linked to EU programmes.

3/ Access and information

Alongside the administrative and financial simplification, it is crucial to improve guidance and information. This can be done by using existing networks, by raising awareness on the programmes to a wider audience focused on those currently excluded (using ambassadors, community leaders or new IT tools) and by developing a unique platform of information on the different programmes in all languages. The role of national and European agencies should be also evaluated and strengthened. National agencies have a key role to play but it is crucial to have common EU priorities to have the most effective impact (national agencies should apply the same rules in terms of priorities, deadlines and procedures).

4/ Participative and sustainable programmes

EU programmes should aim at increasing the mobility of individual learners without forgetting that nearly always there is an organisation supporting them. It is thus important to support individual mobility but also partnerships and policy cooperation between institutions and organisations. For instance, a new budget line should enable the sustainability of good European projects/networks that have an important impact in Europe. European not-for-profit organisations also play a crucial role as multipliers in informing and involving education and training actors in EU cooperation and policy making and in disseminating EU cooperation outputs. The Commission should thus support them in an adequate way via more sustainable operating grants.

CONCLUSIONS

The current Lifelong Learning programme, Youth in Action and Erasmus Mundus programmes and their predecessors have supported learning mobility and the development of innovation in European education and training systems. The EU and its Member States should rightly be proud of this and continue in this pathway. We need a new generation of programmes that is more ambitious, that truly puts learning at the heart of EU2020 and the core of the European project. We therefore call for an investment of at least 2% of the EU budget in the three programmes.

² Stakeholders' Forum key messages, October 2010; « Better Return on Investment » group of NGOs on the financial regulation; Civil Society Contact Group position on the financial regulation; EUCIS-LLL, ESU, EJV position papers on the future programmes and all the other contributions sent during the public consultation. These statements will be summarized in a separate position paper.

Sincerely yours,



Regina Ebner, President



Giuseppe Porcaro,
Secretary General



Johannes Theiner, President



Bert Vandenkendelaere,
Chairperson



Eva Ntovolou, President



Jonathan Favereau,
Secretary General



Regina Ebner, Secretary General



Joke Van der Leeuw-Rood,
Director



Conny Reuter, Secretary General



Stefan Delplace, Secretary General



Brian Arnold, Director



Anne Liekenbrock, Director



Christopher Clouder, Director



Roger Dehaybe, President



Jean Vanoye, President



Manos Valasis, President



John Petersen, Chairman



David Lopez, Secretary General



René Clarijs, Representative



Tommaso Grimaldi, Secretary General



Peter Hodgson, President



Jacob Schouenborg,
General, Secretary



Peter Backfisch,



Pavel Jajtner, President



Georges Van Steene,
Representative



Ton Duif, President



Andrea Waxenegger, President