

**COMMISSION'S CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EU  
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH PROGRAMMES AFTER 2006**

**UNICE'S REPLY**

1. In November 2002, the European Commission launched a consultation process on the future development of the EU education, training and youth programmes after 2006.
2. The objective of the consultation is to invite all those with a direct or indirect interest in action at European level in education, training and youth to give the Commission their views on what the new programmes should contain, how they should be structured, and what individuals and institutions they should target.
3. Consultees are invited in particular to give their opinions on
  - the type of action to be supported through European programmes in the period after 2006;
  - the geographical coverage of the programmes – which countries should be involved in which actions;
  - the design and structure of the new generation of programmes
4. European employers welcome the Commission's aim of launching a process of reflection with all parties concerned as to how coherence and complementarity between Community policies and actions can be achieved, notably through European programmes.

**General Comments**

5. UNICE strongly believes that the future development of the EU education, training and youth programmes must be seen in the context of the goal set by heads of state and government in Lisbon to make of Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.
6. On several occasions, European social partners have underlined the importance of education and training policies in achieving the Lisbon goal as well as the importance of looking at the issue of education and training from a broad perspective, paying attention in particular to its lifelong learning and research dimensions and to the

European Employment Strategy<sup>1</sup>. Such a broad perspective should be reflected in the future development of the EU education, training and youth programmes.

7. It is also crucial that future programmes are focused on their two main functions:
  - to contribute to activating or initiating policies, notably through financing of innovative projects; and
  - to contribute to converting existing and future policy decisions into concrete measures and projects.
8. To that end, strong links must be built between the European policy processes, through which objectives are decided and implementation is followed up, and the European programmes. This required that the programmes take their general priorities from the policy processes in the field of education and training (in particular the Objectives and Bruges/Copenhagen processes) and align their timetables as much as possible (deadlines for selection procedures; deadlines for implementation reports etc.).

### **Specific comments**

#### **On the type of action to be supported by European programmes**

9. Future programmes should support innovative pilot projects i.e. focus on innovation and best practice. For this approach to be successful, the following elements should be taken fully into account
  - financial resources should be pooled on a limited number of projects, capable of bringing real innovation for the European Education Area;
  - application and selection procedures as well as funding should be dealt with by the Commission. In this respect, it is fundamental that reliable, non-bureaucratic, rules of procedures and financial management rules are established within a fixed time schedule in order to give sufficient reliability to applicants;
  - a monitoring system accompanying the projects should be put in place. Indeed, experience has shown that results from programmes' evaluations are available too late for the project promoters and administrators to learn from them. A monitoring system accompanying the projects could contribute both to the improvement of the policy priorities' implementation and to the diffusion/valorisation of innovative projects. It would also allow to better allocating available resources to the most efficient type of projects. Such a system should be put in place by the Commission in cooperation with the national agencies in each Member State and include peer review;
  - evaluation of projects should focus in priority on quality. In current programmes, too much consideration is paid in the evaluation to the financial

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<sup>1</sup> This concern was for example highlighted in UNICE, ETUC and CEEP joint opinion on the draft decision for the second phase of the Community programme for vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci II) from 1 October 1998 and more recently in UNICE/UEAPME, ETUC and CEEP framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications adopted in March 2002

aspects of the projects. The financial administration of the projects should also be lightened;

- projects' results should be better valorised and disseminated. This implies an increased effort of all players at all stages of the projects from the selection procedure to after the final phase of experimentation. Cooperation between the different players in particular at the national level should be promoted. This is a main duty for the national agencies. Such partnerships would have the objective to defining effective strategies for dissemination at local and territorial level. Joint financing of these activities with the social funds for local and territorial development would be useful.

Exchange of experience and good practice should also be organised at transnational level, so that good results of projects can inspire/be integrated in national strategies.

10. A distinction could usefully be made between

- “centralised projects”, having a clear focus on a few priority themes and with a high potential for quality and innovation;
- “decentralised projects”, which could build on the type of projects mentioned above. These projects could have the aim to involve the broadest possible range of players (including social partners etc.) and have a strong dissemination potential.

11. Future projects should increase efforts to promote mobility. Mobility is not an end in itself but it can bring added value by giving a European dimension to learning activities and by bringing new perspectives to learning organisations. Measures to promote mobility have to be differentiated, according to the needs of different target groups. The attractiveness of mobility measures for enterprises and for people at work should also be increased, which entails promoting transfer of education and training achievements to the work situation.

#### On the geographical coverage

12. Making of European education and training systems a world reference is a valuable objective set by Education Ministers. However, clear priority should be given to reaching the Lisbon goals within the enlarged Union and to strengthen links with the EEA countries and remaining candidate countries.

#### On the design and structure of the new programmes

13. European employers believe that coherence and synergy should be increased concerning the content (priorities; type of actions supported etc.) of the existing Socrates, Leonardo and Youth programmes. All three programmes should be integrated in an all-encompassing “lifelong learning framework” so as to highlight the links existing between its different dimensions.

14. However, one should also clearly keep in mind the differences of the target groups of the three existing programmes. Therefore, three sub-programmes should remain in the future with, for example, separate administration (programmes Committees, etc.).

15. It is in particular crucial for UNICE that the specificity of vocational learning is taken into account, even if strong links are built with the other aspects of lifelong learning.

The specificity of vocational learning comes from the people involved (not only students but also workers), the organisations at stake (not only training institutions but also companies and social partners) as well as from the linkage to labour market issues (lifelong learning is a key objective of the European Employment Strategy).

16. In UNICE's view one of the main challenge for the future programmes is to increase their attractiveness for companies. To reach this goal, the following elements should be fully taken into account
  - attractive funding should be secured for innovative pilot projects;
  - output-oriented projects should be promoted more and project administration should be facilitated for the applicants. For example, a lump sum approach should be chosen, maximum two instalments should be foreseen, reliable financial management procedures should be set up and efforts should be made to close the projects within a short time.
  - annual priorities corresponding to the needs of companies should be set up. Inspiration could usefully be drawn from the priorities identified by the European social partners in March 2002 in their framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications. This framework of actions identifies common priorities for actions by social partners in Member States and launches a process of annual follow-up on the actions taken.

## **Conclusion**

17. UNICE believes that the future development of the EU education, training and youth programmes must be seen in the context of the goal set by heads of state and government in Lisbon to make of Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.
18. When reflecting on this issue, a broad perspective should be taken paying equal attention to the lifelong learning, research and labour market dimensions of education and training.
19. Concerning the type of action to be supported by European programmes, UNICE gives priority to the promotion of innovative pilot projects. For this approach to be successful, employers make concrete proposals concerning the allocation of resources, the rules of procedures, the setting up of a monitoring system and the evaluation and dissemination of projects results.
20. Concerning the geographical coverage of the future programmes, UNICE believes that the first objective is to reach the goal set in Lisbon in the enlarged European Union.
21. Concerning the design and structure of the new programmes, employers propose that the Socrates, Leonardo and Youth programmes remain separated in the future with regard to their administration but that increased coherence and synergy is ensured on their content. They also stress the importance of finding differentiated solutions for each target group, in particular when dealing with vocational learning.
22. For the future, UNICE believes that one of the main challenge will be to increase the attractiveness of the programmes for companies. Recommendations are made to that end.