

**COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS FOR THE NEW GENERATION OF COMMUNITY
EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES AFTER 2006**

UNICE'S POSITION

1. UNICE has noted with interest the Communication of the European Commission on the new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006, issued in March 2004, and its proposal for a Decision establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning adopted by the Commission on 14 July 2004.
2. According to the European Commission the new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006 will consist of:
 - a new integrated programme for mobility and cooperation in lifelong learning for the EU Member States, the EEA/EFTA countries and the candidate countries, covering education and training together; and
 - a new "Tempus Plus" programme for cooperation between Member States and countries bordering the Union and the existing Tempus countries, covering the whole spectrum of education and training.
3. The integrated "lifelong learning" programme will contain four separate sectoral programmes, whose coverage will be based on the existing programmes with some adjustments. These sectoral programmes are:
 - "Comenius" for school education,
 - "Erasmus" for higher education,
 - "Leonardo da Vinci" for initial and continuing vocational education and training,
 - "Grundtvig" for adult education.
4. In addition to the four sectoral programmes, there will be two horizontal programmes, i.e.:
 - a "transversal programme", which will cover cross-cutting issues such as support for policy development, language learning, new information and communication technologies, and dissemination and exploitation of results.
 - a "Jean Monnet programme" to support a range of institutions and activities focused on European integration. It will comprise the "Jean Monnet action" itself, provision of operating grants for a set of key institutions and operating grants for European associations active in the fields of education and training.
5. In order for European cooperation in education and training to play its full role in the context on the Lisbon objectives, the Commission proposes over the next programming period to increase the annual budget for the proposed "lifelong learning" programme by four times compared with the current level.

6. The European Commission also reflects on how more coherence and complementarity between national and Community policies and actions can be achieved through these European programmes.

General Comments

7. UNICE cannot stress more the need to enshrine the future EU programmes on education and training in the Lisbon strategy. The future “lifelong learning” programme in particular must play an active part in making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.
8. UNICE welcomes that the Commission takes into account a broad policy background in its reasoning, trying to bridge the different strands of the Lisbon strategy: European Employment Strategy, Objectives process on education, Copenhagen process on vocational training, Bologna process on higher education and other lifelong learning initiatives.
9. UNICE also welcomes the Commission proposal to have a single, simple and more flexible lifelong learning programme, which brings together the different education and training programmes and allows for evolution depending on changes in the economy and labour markets needs that emerge during the programme’s lifetime (from 2007 until 2016).
10. However, employers believe that simplifying and rationalising the legal basis for Community instruments is in it self not sufficient. While this process is important, employers want to see a more outcomes-focused approach to ensure that education and training policies will fulfil their role in creating a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society. It remains to be seen, in particular through the setting of annual priorities and the effective management of resources devoted to the future programme, whether the good intentions will be turned into practice.

Specific comments

11. Today, companies experience skills shortages in some sectors whereas unemployment is a persistent pattern of Europe’s labour market. In UNICE’s view the future lifelong learning programme must be a useful instrument to help reduce the existing skills mismatches by equipping individuals with a range of qualifications and competences that are relevant to the needs of employers and of the labour market.
12. One of the main challenges for the future programme is therefore to give better support to initiatives by the private sector and to increase its attractiveness for companies. In their position paper published in February 2003, employers made concrete proposals in this respect, i.e.:
 - to tailor EU programme annual priorities and funding opportunities to the real learning needs identified by companies and/or social partners;
 - to focus EU programmes on supporting innovation and best practice;
 - to better identify and valorise good practice and disseminate project results, so as to be able to learn from others’ experiences;
 - to simplify the tender procedures and to reform the resources available.

On a programme which responds to companies’ priorities

13. UNICE welcomes the fact that the Commission stresses the need for a closer relationship between annual priorities and work being done through the Objectives work programme, the Copenhagen and Bologna processes. The Commission also rightly foresees the possibility of involving specific calls for proposals, or the allocation of specific budgets for such actions.
14. UNICE however regrets that no mention is made of the priorities identified by the European social partners in March 2002 in their framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications. Taking greater account of this work and the way in which the priorities are formulated would help tailor the programme to the actual needs of companies.

On dissemination of good results

15. The Commission foresees an increased effort towards the sharing of the results of projects supported through the programme. The dissemination of project results and products will be the shared responsibility of national agencies, which will receive a budget to manage for that purpose, and of the Community level, in order to ensure better links between projects operating in the same or related fields.
16. Employers welcome that the good experiences under the Leonardo programme are extended to the entire lifelong learning spectrum. However, experience has shown that results from programme evaluations are available too late for the project promoters and administrators to learn from them. Therefore, UNICE believes that the Commission should be put in place a monitoring system to accompany the projects, in cooperation with the national agencies, in order to be able to identify the good results of projects much more rapidly. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that, at the national level, effective strategies for dissemination at local and territorial level should be devised in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders.

On the administrative and accounting burdens of projects

17. European employers welcome the Commission's statement following which the administrative and accounting burdens should be proportional to the size of the grant, and the fact that the Commission makes concrete proposals to lighten the administrative burden of the projects, i.e.:
 - to make a greater use of flat-rate grants;
 - to enable simpler application forms and contracts;
 - to extend the potential for use of co-financing through contributions in kind, and limiting the accounting obligations of beneficiaries in such cases;
 - to simplify the financial documentation that beneficiaries have to provide to demonstrate their financial and operational capacity and in the ancillary declarations they have to make.
18. To lighten in reality the administrative and accounting burdens for project promoters the financial regulation and implementing rules will have to be revised. Employers call on the Commission to propose as soon as possible the appropriate amendments.

On the decentralisation of the programme

19. In comparison with the present programmes, the Commission proposes that a greater proportion of activities should be managed at national level, through the network of national agencies. The Commission proposes an increase to 83% in the proportion of the budget managed via the national agencies, principally individual mobility.

20. UNICE understands the concern of the European Commission that the education and training funds are spent in ways which respond more closely to the needs identified locally and are closer to national priorities and interests. However, UNICE believe that the Commission should state more clearly how it will ensure that initiatives funded at national level contribute efficiently to the priorities set at European level.
21. Employers share the concern of the Commission to give more emphasis to initiatives promoting mobility in Europe. There again, the attractiveness of mobility measures for enterprises and for people at work will have to be increased in order to reach the targets set by the Commission in this field, i.e.:
- at least 150,000 Leonardo trainee placements per year by 2013
 - at least 50,000 adults learning and teaching abroad per year by 2013.

On the European programme management committee

22. UNICE noted the intention of the Commission to establish a committee for the integrated programme, which will meet in different formations according to the subject at stake. The Commission envisages that five separate formations will be needed: one to cover the Integrated Programme as a whole, the transversal programme and the Jean Monnet programme; and four others to cover Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig.
23. As in the Leonardo da Vinci programme at present, the social partners will be consulted within the framework of committee meetings where the subject matter concerns vocational education and training. European employers welcome this decision, which acknowledges the important role played by social partners in education and training systems in general and in vocational training in particular.
24. However, they call on the Commission to ensure that participation of employer representatives is also granted in practice to the Committee meetings, when more general points are discussed such as the projects funded under the transversal programme and its four key activities (i.e. policy development, language learning, ICT and dissemination). Indeed, projects funded under the transversal programme will touch upon issues such as the follow-up to the objectives process and the lifelong learning resolution, the collection and analysis of statistics and indicators at European level, etc. Due to their involvement at national and European levels on these issues, employers feel that they should also have the opportunity to contribute to this Committee setting.

Conclusion

25. To conclude, UNICE welcomes the Commission proposal to have a single, simple and more flexible lifelong learning programme, which brings together the different education and training programmes.
26. In employers' view, one of the main challenges for the future programme is to give better support to initiatives by the private sector and to increase its attractiveness for companies. Taking greater account of the priorities identified by the European social partners in March 2002 in their framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications and the way in which the priorities are formulated would help tailor the programme to the actual needs of companies.

27. European employers welcome the Commission intention to lighten the administrative and accounting burdens for project promoters. The Commission should propose appropriate amendments to the financial regulation and implementing rules.
28. Finally, UNICE call on the Commission to ensure that participation of employer representatives is also granted to the Programme Management Committee meetings, when general policy points are discussed (i.e. projects funded under the transversal programme).