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37. CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES CONTINUING EDUCATION NETWORK (EUCEN) “TRANSFORMING THE UNIVERSITY INTO A LIFELONG LEARNING UNIVERSITY”

**ROUNDTABLE “STAKEHOLDERS’ VISION ON LIFELONG LEARNING
UNIVERSITY”, CHAIRED BY DR. PAT DAVIS, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF
EUCEN)**

SATURDAY 28 MARCH 2009, LEUVEN

SPEAKING NOTES FOR PHILIPPE DE BUCK, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Importance of Lifelong Learning

- Globalization and the knowledge society are confronting education and training systems with considerable challenges. These become even more demanding as a result of demographic change.
- It is essential to enhance human capital and employability by upgrading skills and to ensure a better match between labour market demand and supply. This is one of the main conclusions of the Commission’s communication “New Skills for New Jobs” of December 2008. There is no doubt that the trend towards higher skilled and better qualified jobs will only continue. It is expected that, between 2006 and 2020, the proportion of jobs requiring high levels of education attainment will rise from about 25 percent to more than 30 percent in the EU.
- Education institutions are in a key position to respond to those challenges by contributing to the lifelong learning of individuals to improve skill levels. They can help to continuously adapt and expand knowledge and the ability to apply the knowledge acquired. Well-designed lifelong learning systems have the potential to offset the economic cost of skills shortages.
- European business welcomes the considerable efforts at European level to modernise education & training systems so that they can more closely address the needs of labour markets.



- But there is still much room for improvement in Member States. There are discrepancies across the European Union in terms of the quality and delivery of education & training. Participation rates of adults in lifelong learning are rising too slowly and only in certain Member States. Survey results for 2007 show that under 10 percent of 25-64-year-olds participated in some form of lifelong learning activity in the EU. Significant discrepancies can also be seen in the differences in proportions of GDP spent, school dropout rates and total years spent in education.
- Improving employability involves not only those who enter the labour market: Lifelong Learning policies and practices are key to raise the employability of those who are already in the workforce by refreshing and updating their skills and competences on a continuous basis. Individuals need to increasingly take greater responsibility for their own employability.
- Given the changing evolution of labour markets, and the underlying shift from 'job security' to 'employment security', education & training needs to reinforce the importance of transversal competences and soft skills. In addition to specialist skills, these are important as more people will increasingly face transitions. In particular, communication, languages, teamwork and decision making will increase the adaptability of employees. The implementation of entrepreneurship education and teaching "learning to learn" is especially important.
- In addition to that, universities need to focus on innovation and technology. The future of EU competitiveness depends on better exploiting its innovation potential given the increasingly global competition for higher added-value activities.
- Lifelong Learning policies must not be understood as being most relevant for adults, but must instead permeate all areas of education and training, starting from pre-school.



Concerning the draft recommendations of EUCEN:

General comments

- The important role of business and its involvement is not mentioned at all in the draft recommendations.
- Universities cannot deliver Lifelong Learning alone. Lifelong learning has to be developed in partnership with business organisations which have an in-depth insight into the evolving needs of enterprises concerning employee qualifications.
- Overall, in Europe, we can say that the potential untapped benefits of cooperation between enterprises and universities are great – and this is an area where we must exploit the possibilities that exist
 - for the performance of educational institutions;
 - for the individuals, the students, the future business leaders of Europe;
 - and for the well-being of companies
- Therefore, the Dialogue between higher education institutions and business about the relevant labour market related competences and qualifications must be intensified. There are of course many different ways of achieving this and the means chosen must be tailored to local circumstances.
- We need genuine partnership structures between universities and the world of business where actors share responsibilities. This will significantly improve the efficiency of spending and mobilisation of existing resources.

Specific comments

With regard to the recommendation:

“Universities should examine Lifelong Learning as an aspect of institutional culture”

- Lifelong Learning needs to be fully integrated into the missions and strategies of universities. Higher education institutions will have to adapt their offers to different kinds of students: young people, mature students and employees undertaking studies while working. The accessibility to educational institutions



should also be enhanced, notably opening access to those who hold a vocational qualification.

- At a time when student numbers may well start to decrease for demographic reasons, continuing education can also offer potential opportunities for universities to face this development.
- A concerted effort is needed to help to dismantle gender stereotypes at all levels to address current and potential future labour market distortions. In this regard, a notably higher uptake of woman in science, technology, and engineering disciplines need to be achieved.

With regard to the recommendation:

“Universities should review the way in which a Lifelong Learning University is managed and organised to reflect the trends in the way it is delivered”

- We need more competition into higher education systems as this is the main factor driving excellence. To become competitive in a global setting, it is important now to strive for a greater degree of autonomy in universities’ governance structures. More autonomy can significantly increase the efficiency of universities’ spending.
- Involvement of company representatives on advisory boards as well as the development of regular formal and informal communication channels with enterprises is needed. In Austria for example, the University Act has established University Councils where experienced business figures have a role in offering expertise and know-how on company needs but also on management, human resources, and advice on fulfilling strategic goals.
- Improvement of the quality of guidance structures and career services, notably by optimising the potential of regular feedback mechanisms on both supply and demand side between HRs, companies, social partners and public bodies.

With regard to the recommendation:

“Universities should monitor carefully the sources of funding for Lifelong Learning University courses as the recession bites all sources may come under pressure.”



- The sharing of good practice in relation to accessing diverse sources of funding, such as private funding, should be seen as an opportunity to guarantee further sustainable development of institutions and their autonomy.

With regard to the recommendation:

“Universities should promote staff development jointly with external stakeholders - for university staff and for personnel in the stakeholder organisations”

- University staff should have ongoing opportunities to gain insight and experience into economic life through training periods in companies which also enables them to keep abreast of up-to-date knowledge evolution.
- But not only personnel of higher education institutions, also students need more exposure to the world of business. This would also help to facilitate the transition from education to professional life.
- The professional world needs to be integrated in higher education to a greater extent. This does not solely mean the completion of internships as regular parts of study programmes but also the inclusion of teachers with a professional background.
- In addition, there should be close a cooperation with representatives of the professional practice during the conception of study courses.
