

UNICE position paper on the future EU cooperation in the field of education and training Executive Summary

1. In March 2000, at the Lisbon European Council, Member States' governments defined a new strategic goal for the European Union in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy. They underlined the role of education and training policies in this respect and set concrete objectives for the future.
2. Over the last two years, the Council and the Commission have taken a number of initiatives to implement these objectives. In March 2002, the Barcelona European Council will be the occasion for governments to review progress in the field of education and training and to set action priorities for the coming years.
3. The implementation of lifelong learning strategies can make a valuable contribution to solving Europe's employment problems, improving adaptability of employees and overcoming obstacles to industrial change in the European Union. Social partners at all levels have an important role to play in this context. At European level, the specific joint contribution of UNICE, CEEP and ETUC to the Lisbon objectives on the lifelong development of competencies will be presented in view of the Barcelona Summit.
4. In its synthesis report adopted on 15 January 2002, the Commission calls on Member States to send out the necessary political signal so that a process for coordination of national education and training policies, together with development on new initiatives at European level can see the light of day. In this context, UNICE believes it important to underline the following elements:

Coherence between the future process for coordination of education and training policies and the Luxembourg process for employment must be ensured.

A coherent strategy is essential to ensure that measures taken in Member States have a real impact on the general employment situation and respond to companies' needs, notably by creating conditions conducive to increased development of competencies within companies.

Better coordination of national policies for education, training, research and innovation at European level can be useful.

The objectives set by the Council for education and training systems and the choice of the open coordination method are a move in the right direction. However, further work needs to be done on indicators and benchmarks.

Recognition of learning achievements and transparency of qualifications are important questions.

Responsibility in this field is mainly national. However, at European level, exchanges of experiences and actions with a view to improving employee mobility and transparency of competencies and qualifications on the labour market are desirable.

Lisbon objectives:

1. In March 2000, at the Lisbon European Council, Member States' governments affirmed their intention of "modernising the European social model by investing in people and building an active welfare state".
2. In the field of education and training, the following specific objectives were set:
 - a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human

resources;

- the number of people with only lower-secondary education who are not in further education and training should be halved by 2010;
- schools and training centres should be developed into multi-purpose local learning centres accessible to all;
- new basic skills to be provided, notably in IT (European framework for new basic skills; European diploma for basic IT skills);
- foster the mobility of students, teachers and researchers;
- greater transparency in the recognition of qualifications and periods of study and training (optimal use of European programmes; common European format for curricula vitae);
- a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems;
- improving employability and reducing skills gaps (Europe-wide data base on jobs and learning opportunities);
- giving higher priority to lifelong learning (activities of the social partners; European award for progressive firms) and benchmarking progress.

Overview of actions taken after two years:

1. Over the last two years there have been concrete initiatives at European level, notably:

- in February 2001, the Council adopted a report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems. A detailed work programme for implementation of this report has been drawn up jointly by Commission and Council and will be submitted for adoption by the Council on 14 February 2002;
- on 21 November 2001, the Commission adopted a communication entitled "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality" and drawing on the results of consultation on the memorandum published in October 2000. The purpose of the communication is to provide a general framework for education and training policies, including all existing initiatives such as the eLearning initiative (Commission action plan dated 28 March 2001

and Council resolution dated 13 July 2001);

- on the theme of skills and mobility, on 28 February 2001 the Commission adopted a communication "New European labour markets open to all with access to all" and will very soon publish an action plan based on the conclusions of the high-level group which worked on this issue from June to December 2001;
- the Commission has also made specific proposals for mobility of students, trainees and teachers.

1. However, the latest figures available show that little tangible progress has been made towards increasing per capita public investment in human resources and reducing the school dropout rate^[1]

2. The Barcelona European Council will be the occasion for governments to review progress towards meeting the objectives they set themselves in Lisbon. They will also set action priorities for the coming year at this summit.

3. In its synthesis report adopted on 15 January 2002, the Commission proposes action priorities for the year 2002. Among other things, the Commission calls on Member States to send out the necessary political signal so that a process for coordination of national education and training policies, together with development on new initiatives at European level can see the light of day in the next few months. Under the shared banner of a European area of knowledge, an integrated approach to education and vocational training policies, but also research and innovation, would be developed in this way. The objective of this integrated approach would be to develop more fully "the knowledge" on which the European economy will increasingly be based, in line with the objectives set in Lisbon.

UNICE's priorities for vocational training:

4. UNICE's members have long been convinced that education and vocational training are at the heart of the policies needed to meet the economic and social challenges which Europe faces. To meet these challenges, it is indispensable to implement lifelong learning strategies.

5. In this context, UNICE has identified seven priorities ^[2]:

I. To remain competitive in the world market place, European companies need a quality workforce with high levels of qualifications and skills that meet their needs.

II. Foundation learning, which is a responsibility for the Member States, must meet the highest quality standards and give individuals a good basis for their working lives. Foundation learning must develop the ability to learn how to learn to adapt to changes in the work place and on the labour market.

III. Foundation learning must provide individuals not only with basic knowledge but also with soft skills, such as personal and social skills, that are needed in working life. Lifelong learning must be geared towards business needs. Individuals must be equipped with a range of qualifications and skills that are relevant to the needs of employers and of the labour market.

IV. Lifelong learning has many benefits for companies and individuals alike. It empowers individuals as regards their employability and their continuous training – formal and informal – throughout their working life.

V. Lifelong learning requires co-operation and partnership between all stakeholders and is a shared responsibility between individuals, companies and governments. Lifelong learning means building a solid basis for continuous learning throughout an individual's working life, underpinned by effective strategies and flexible systems and arrangements. Strategies and systems vary from one Member State to another, depending on the different traditions and legal contexts in place. This diversity needs to be respected.

VI. Labour market reforms must support lifelong learning strategies

so as to translate economic growth into employment.

VII. The European Union has a role to lay in strengthening co-operation between Member States through the exchange of experience and best practice, with the full participation of

social partners, and in promoting transparency of qualifications across the Union.

6. In addition, while it is true that putting in place genuine lifelong learning strategies requires a sustained investment, the real priority is to verify the relevance and effectiveness of investments and to ensure a clear division of responsibilities between public authorities, companies and individuals in this area. Furthermore, co-investment by the company and the individual and development of the various forms it can take, combining financial resources, but also time, etc., must be encouraged. The state, too, must encourage companies and individuals to invest, notably by removing tax constraints on investment in the field of human resources. For that reason, UNICE endorses the Commission's proposal to draw up an overview of existing tax incentives in Member States.

7. Lastly, over the last year, UNICE has been involved together with CEEP and ETUC in joint work aiming at a specific joint contribution of social partners to the realisation of lifelong learning in the context of the Lisbon objectives. The contribution of the European social partners on the lifelong development of competencies will be presented at the Barcelona Summit.

UNICE message to governments for the Barcelona summit:

?Coherence with European employment strategy:

8. There is an evident link between education and training policies and employment policies. The implementation of lifelong learning strategies can make a valuable contribution to solving Europe's employment problems, improving adaptability of employees and

overcoming obstacles to industrial change in the European Union. The European employment guidelines already regard the implementation of lifelong learning strategies as being a horizontal objective as well as a more specific objective under the employability and the adaptability pillars. For these reasons, it is important to avoid duplications between the future coordination of education and training policies and the Luxembourg process for employment.

9. A coherent strategy is essential to ensure that measures taken in Member States have a real impact on the general employment situation and respond to companies' needs, notably by creating conditions conducive for increased development of competencies within the company.

?Coordination of national policies for education, training, research and innovation:

10. UNICE fully supports the efforts of Member States, since the Stockholm European Council, to ensure greater coordination of national policies for education, training, research and innovation. It believes that the open method of coordination, through structured exchanges of experience, evaluation and monitoring, is an appropriate tool to help Member States to achieve the objectives they have set themselves.

11. UNICE holds the view that the objectives set by the Council^[3] are moving in the right direction. Yet, work to date on indicators and benchmarks to analyse and compare national policies does not make it possible to measure the progress made^[4]. These indicators and benchmarks are on the one hand more assertions than indicators and on the other hand they are insufficiently targeted on results and very far removed from the reality of the labour market.

12. For instance:

- existing indicators for development of education and lifelong

learning give only a partial picture of reality since they only record the participation of adults in formal training;

- similarly, the existing indicator for private sector investment in the field of human resources relates only to the participation of employees in formal training. Yet, companies' investment in competence development relates as much to non-formal and informal as to formal training;
- there are no plans to measure the impact of measures taken with a view to the objective of "increasing recruitment in scientific and technical positions" on the shortages of qualified workers on the labour market.

Recognition of learning achievements and transparency of qualifications:

1. UNICE recognises the need to make learning achievements more visible beyond the level of the company, notably learning achievements through work experience (non-formal and informal learning). To that end, diplomas, professional certificates or other transparent and easily recognised qualifications are useful instruments.
2. UNICE is favourable to the arrangements put in place in Member States with a view to formalising the skills acquired by employees in the company and making them more transparent. Social partners play an important role in this respect. In time, such arrangements could take a standardised form in order to facilitate cross-border recognition, for instance along the lines of the modular ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), but for the moment the essential point continues to be national recognition.
3. At European level, UNICE considers that the Community proposals seeking to define European education and training standards should remain within the confines of the powers conferred by articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, which assign responsibility for education and training to Member States in the first instance.

4. UNICE warmly supports some activities already undertaken at European level and believes that:

- it is important to pursue structured exchanges between Member States, with participation of the social partners, in fora on the transparency of qualifications and the quality of vocational training;
- such structured exchanges could be usefully extended to the field of guidance and counselling;
- Community initiatives designed to increase the transparency of qualifications are useful (e.g. Europass or the European IT driving licence). Yet, final users' assessment of the practical use of existing instruments should be carried out prior to the creation of new instruments in this area.

1. However, European employers consider that some proposals of the Commission should be re-examined in order to ensure that they build upon national actions following the subsidiarity principle, effectively promote greater mobility of employees in Europe and are developed on a voluntary basis.

2. This is in particular the case for the proposal to create a general Community system for recognition of vocational qualifications for non-regulated professions. In the case of regulated professions, a general Community system for recognition is necessary in order to remove legal obstacles to free movement of employees. If a profession is not regulated, this is not necessary. Moreover, past CEDEFOP work in this field has shown that setting up a general Community system is not feasible, given the extreme diversity of national qualification systems for non-regulated professions. At EU level, actions should focus on promoting transparency of national qualifications or other tools to validate learning achievements.

Conclusion

3. UNICE believes that implementation of lifelong learning

strategies is a response to the challenges that European companies face today.

4. At European level, coordination of national policies for education, training, research and innovation can be helpful. However, if the measures taken in Member States are to have a real impact on the general employment situation and to meet companies' needs, it is essential to coordinate education and training policies with employment policies.

5. The objectives set by the Council for education and training systems and the choice of the open method of coordination are a move in the right direction. However, further work needs to be done on indicators and benchmarks.

6. The transparency and mutual recognition of qualifications must be firstly developed in Member States. This question is also important at the level of the European Union and can lead to exchanges of experiences and to actions with a view to improving employee mobility and transparency of competencies and qualifications on the labour market while remaining within the confines of the subsidiarity principle.

[1] See Commission communication "The Lisbon strategy-making change happen" dated 15 January 2001, page 9

[2] For education and training policies which foster competitiveness and employment-UNICE's seven priorities, February 2000

[3] Report by the Education Council to the European Council on "future concrete objectives for education and training systems" adopted on 12 February 2001

[4] UNICE has already had occasion to give its detailed comments on this question to the Commission, when it was consulted, as a member of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, during preparation of the joint work programme for follow-up of the Council report