

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the role of the development of skills and competences in taking forward the Lisbon goals

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THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

Having regard to:

1. The European Council Conclusions adopted on March 2005 ⁽¹⁾, which re-launched the Lisbon Strategy by focusing on growth and jobs with an emphasis on knowledge, innovation and human capital and on lifelong learning as a *sine qua non* for the achievement of these objectives.

2. The Lisbon integrated guidelines for growth and jobs (2005 to 2008) ⁽²⁾, which call for education and training systems to be adapted through:

- raising and ensuring their attractiveness, openness and quality standards;
- responding to new occupational needs, key competences and future skill requirements by improving the definition and transparency of qualifications, their effective recognition and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

RECALL THAT:

1. As part of the Copenhagen Process, the Maastricht Communiqué of December 2004 called for a focus on 'linking vocational education and training (VET) with the labour market requirements of the knowledge economy for a highly skilled workforce', and for the development of a European Qualifications Framework 'based mainly on competences and learning outcomes'.
2. As part of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme, the 2004 Joint Interim Report ⁽³⁾ called for increased partnership (national, regional, local and sectoral) to develop flexible and effective education and training systems and for a European Qualifications Framework on which the Commission is currently holding consultations.

EMPHASISE THAT:

1. 'Skills and competences' in these conclusions cover the range of outcomes from all forms and levels of learning,

encompassing the results of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Skills and competences contribute to personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social cohesion, whilst providing a foundation for economic growth. They also contribute to adaptability, innovation and the growth of entrepreneurship.

2. The performance of the EU economy would be improved through greater productivity, entrepreneurship and take-up of research results and innovation.

STRESS THAT:

1. Increases in workers' skills and competences improve productivity. A skilled workforce is better able to respond to the changes of a dynamic knowledge economy, while people with higher levels of skills and competences are more likely to be socially integrated, fulfilled and active citizens.
2. The knowledge-based society and economy needs an adequate level of key competences, including digital literacy and e-skills for its citizens and the capacity to build higher level skills and competences as required.
3. Economic growth may not be achieved if investment in skills and competences is limited to the well-educated. Substantial economic gains may also be achieved by improving key competences and by addressing the needs of low-skilled and disadvantaged groups, including through the better use of existing skills and competences, for example, of older citizens.

AGREE THAT:

1. The development of skills and competences is a key element of lifelong learning strategies. These should include the acquisition of key competences and build upon effective general education and training systems which result in individuals who are keen to renew and develop their skills and competences throughout life. Parity of esteem and links between VET and general education should be fostered. Lifelong guidance is also crucial in supporting individuals to achieve and renew their skills and competences.

⁽¹⁾ Doc. 7619/1/05.

⁽²⁾ Doc. 10205/05 (to be published in the Official Journal).

⁽³⁾ Doc. 6905/04.

2. Education and Training Ministers have a key role in ensuring effective skills and competence strategies. To achieve this, close collaboration is essential with all relevant ministries.
3. Education and training policies should also include a forward-looking approach, in order to anticipate the skills, competence and occupational needs of society and the economy.
4. The relevant Ministries should therefore gain the active involvement of economic and social partners and other stakeholders, including research bodies, to identify sectoral needs for skills and competences. Such partnerships can improve productivity, reduce skills gaps and provide employers with incentives to educate and train their workforces.
5. The establishment of a European Qualifications Framework should result in more transparency and recognition of the skills and competences that the labour market needs, and enable sectors at European level to address new education and training challenges.
6. Innovative methods of delivering learning, for example using ICT, allow wider participation in lifelong learning and so can reduce social exclusion and improve work-life balance. Flexible learning provision for workers can be facilitated through improved collaboration with suppliers of learning and effective use of the ICT infrastructure.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION JOINTLY TO:

1. address the issue of sectoral skills in the context of developing skills and competences, as a part of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme;

2. use future Community instruments in the field of education and training to support the development of sector-based approaches to skills and competences in relation to both VET and higher education.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES TO:

1. ensure effective collaboration between relevant ministries in the development of strategies for skills and competences, including during the preparation of their annual Lisbon national reports and as part of their national lifelong learning strategies;
2. build partnerships, at national, regional, local and sectoral levels with key stakeholders, including employers and trade unions, in accordance with national legislation and practice. These partnerships should create a system which responds to demand, takes account of long-term skills and competence needs, encourages investment in skills and competences and addresses the specific needs of disadvantaged groups;
3. instigate collaboration between education and training providers to exploit existing ICT infrastructures, in order to widen participation in lifelong learning, and improve the level of e-skills of their citizens.

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:

1. establish in 2006 a cluster of those Member States wishing to develop peer-learning activities on sectoral skills, as part of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme;
2. invite Cedefop and, where appropriate, the European Training Foundation to complete in 2006 an overview of different sectoral approaches to skills and competences across the EU and in the accession and candidate countries.