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THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Introduction

The purpose of this note is to describe and assess the progress made by the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) in education and training and to identify a number of key challenges and questions for the future in order to strengthen the usefulness of the Education & Training 2010 work programme (E&T 2010) for national policy setting and its links to the Lisbon process.

The E&T 2010 work programme and OMC combines the following elements (i)-(vi):

(i) An integrated approach to education and training

The Education Council adopted for the first time in 2001 common future objectives of education and training systems focused on quality, accessibility and openness, and subsequently indicators and benchmarks to measure progress. In 2002, it adopted a resolution committing the Member States and the European Union to the development of lifelong learning approaches, and national strategies to support them. The Copenhagen process was also launched in 2002 by the Ministers responsible for vocational education and training in cooperation with the social partners and the European Commission, with a view to improving cooperation in the field of vocational education and training. Since 2004, the E&T 2010 work programme integrates all these various policy orientations, including the implementation of the 2001 Mobility Recommendation and Action Plan, into one framework which also takes into account the outcomes of the Bologna process in the field of higher education. It thus covers all dimensions (formal and non-formal) and levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher, adult education and continuing training) of education and training within a lifelong learning perspective. E&T 2010 addresses in detail the issues which arise within the integrated Lisbon guidelines no. 23 (investment in human capital) and no. 24 (adapt education and training systems).

In summary, the challenges related to forging an integrated approach are twofold: how to integrate the different elements and policy challenges across and between different dimensions and levels of education and training; and how to integrate education and training issues with the broader socio-economic debate under Lisbon.

- How should the link between the future Lisbon guidelines and the post-2010 E&T work programme be strengthened without weakening the balance between the economic, social and cultural dimensions of education and training?
- How can the Copenhagen process and the results of the Bologna process be better integrated within this post-2010 work programme so that the continuing barriers are reduced between VET and higher education in order to achieve genuine lifelong learning? How can we decide on where, across the different dimensions and levels, the policy priorities for education and training should be set?

(ii) Supporting instruments and structures

In addition to the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 and the structural funds, various instruments support the development and implementation of the policy reflection within E&T 2010 and on lifelong learning at the EU level. The most important are: Eurydice, Cedefop and ETF; European networks on, for example, lifelong guidance, quality assurance in VET and HE; expert networks on the economics and social sciences in education (EENEE and NESSE); research carried out by CRELL and the 7th research framework programme.

Concerning structures, at the formal political level, the Education Committee effectively functions as a Council working group with the important role of preparing the Education Council and carrying out detailed examination of both legislative and non-legislative texts.

Since its creation in 2005, it is the Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group (ETCG) which supports and coordinates the operational management and implementation of E&T 2010. The ETCG brings together the various strands of E&T 2010, particularly general education and VET, within a lifelong learning perspective. It has addressed important operational issues, notably the work and results of the clusters and peer learning activities, the use of the structural funds for E&T and participating countries' national reports on lifelong learning and on the implementation of E&T 2010 (see below). Questions in relation to indicators and benchmarks are dealt with in the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (see section v. below)

Additional orientations for the development of E&T 2010 come from the meetings of the High Level Group and sectoral groups/committees in VET and Higher Education (DGVT, ACVT and DGHE).

However, there is currently no overall high level structure with a clear and primary focus on policy strategy across education and training; i.e. a body which could feed directly into the Education Council, thus increasing ministers' ownership and use of the results of E&T 2010 and their capacity to reinforce education's role in and contribution to Lisbon.

- How can we develop an appropriate structure for the strategic policy discussion of LLL issues and to channel the results of E&T 2010 into the Education Council, while at the same time continuing the effective operational coordination and management of the open method of coordination?

(iii) Common European reference tools

Close cooperation between the Commission, expert groups, Member States and stakeholders has resulted in the development and agreement of various European reference tools which support EU and national policy development and reforms. These take the form of common principles, guidelines or reference frameworks. Examples are the 2004 resolution/conclusion on lifelong guidance and the validation of non formal and informal learning, the recently adopted recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning and the proposal for a European Qualifications Framework that is currently being discussed by Council and Parliament. The European reference tools both result from the work of the various activities under E&T 2010 and feed into these activities (e.g. supporting national implementation through peer learning activities - see below).

- How can we ensure that agreed European reference tools are better disseminated and taken up in national reforms of education and training systems; that the lessons learned in their implementation are absorbed into the EU-level reflection and that future instruments of this type can continue to be highly relevant to national policy making?

(iv) Strengthening policy development and implementation through clusters and peer learning activities

Peer learning activities (PLAs) have been developed since 2005 by clusters of countries sharing a common interest in a thematic priority. They aim, through mutual learning, to support policy development and implementation which is closer to national needs and situations but in line with the common objectives of E&T 2010. Presentations and discussions in the ETCG of the work and results of clusters and PLAs have ensured that all countries, while they participate in a limited number of clusters, continue to make an input to and benefit from the overall process.

Ministers at recent Education Councils have expressed strong support for this working method. Although, several of the PLAs are still at an early stage in their work, ETCG members are also highly supportive of the process and find the organisation and coverage of clusters and PLAs to be appropriate and relevant to national needs. Several countries have reported that these activities have already had a direct impact on domestic policy reform – for example:

- on arrangements for the validation of non formal and informal learning;
- on higher education reform;
- on the impact of ICT on teacher training;
- on the preparations for the implementation of the EQF and the design and development of national qualifications frameworks (20 Member States are now in the process of introducing such frameworks).

However, there is still a problem about getting relevant results more widely disseminated and known to Ministers and policy-implementers within the Member States.

- How can the results of the clusters/PLAs and examples of best practice be better captured and disseminated at European and national levels in order to make them available for use by Ministers, policy implementers and practitioners?
- Can the work and impact of the clusters and PLAs be further strengthened, for example, by moving towards a peer review approach?

(v) Reporting

Every two years, Member States prepare national reports on their progress in implementing E&T 2010 and, on this basis, the Council and Commission agree on a Joint Progress Report and key messages to the spring European Council. This reporting mechanism is complementary to, and feeds into the Lisbon integrated reporting cycle, including the implementation of the Youth Pact. The next Joint Progress Report will be adopted in February 2008. It will focus on the progress made by the 32 participating countries in establishing coherent and comprehensive national lifelong learning strategies as requested by the 2004 European Council.

In addition, there is the annual analytical report based on the agreed framework of indicators and benchmarks (revised in May 2007).

However, little bilateral dialogue has yet taken place between the Commission and Member States on their national E&T 2010 reports and their LLL strategies.

- How can the biennial national reports on the implementation of E&T 2010 contribute better to national Lisbon Reform Programmes?
- How can an appropriate dialogue and follow-up be developed between the Commission and individual Member States on key E&T challenges and Lisbon recommendations?
- Is the current set of 5 European benchmarks in line with current challenges of the various levels of E&T within the Lisbon strategy?

(vi) Involvement of the broader education and training community

The improvement of education and training is very much dependant on the role of stakeholders, providers, practitioners and learners, particularly in contributing to policy implementation and practice, through innovation and identifying "what works". While the current exchanges with national ministers, officials and experts are working well and there is some Commission consultation of stakeholders, there is undoubtedly scope to extend European cooperation to the broader education and training community.

- How can the involvement of the broader education and training community be developed without diluting the existing exchanges between the Commission and Member States?

Overview of Cluster and PLA activities 2006-2007

Update: 30 May 2007

Cluster	Peer Learning Activities etc.	EU level outputs	Key events 2007
<p>1. Modernisation of Higher Education</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings (April, July and November). <p><u>Meetings 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings (April, June and October). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October, PLA on joint implementation of curriculum and funding reforms in NO. • October, PLA on partnerships between universities and business in the UK. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March, PLA on government steering of autonomous institutions in NL. • October, PLA on implementation of NQF/EQF in higher education, BG. • Work on a Compendium of good practices in HE-reform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up to the Communication on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May, London Bologna Conference. • July, Bologna Experts Conference. • November, PT Presidency Conference on Modernisation of HE.
<p>2. Teachers and trainers:</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings (March, June and December). <p><u>Meetings 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings in (February, June and November). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May/June, PLA on developing schools as learning communities for their teachers in NL. • December, Peer Learning Seminar on School Leadership policy organised by Commission in Brussels. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March, PLA on partnerships between VET schools and companies in AT. • May, PLA on preparing teachers to respond to classroom diversity in NO. • Oct, PLA on relationships between schools and teacher education providers, DK. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of Teacher Education (2007). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PT Presidency Conference on Teacher Education.
<p>3. Making best use of resources:</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (May and November). <p><u>Meetings 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (June and December). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March, workshop on Investing in and Financing of VET in HU. • April, PLA on University governance: Autonomy and accountability in DK. • September, Presidency Conference on Efficiency and Equity, FI. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March, Conference on Evidence-based policy in DE. • May, PLA on evidence-based-policy and practice in NL. • November, PLA on resources in pre-school education in BE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up to the Communication and Council conclusions on Efficiency and Equity. • Staff Working Document: Evidence Based Policy and Practice (2007). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May, Council discussions on EPP. • DE Presidency conference on Evidence Based Policies. • DE Informal Ministerial on Pre-School Education.
<p>4. Maths, Science and Technology:</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (May and November). <p><u>Meetings 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (April and October). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November, PLA on holistic MST reforms in NL. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May, PLA on mathematics education in SE. • October, PLA on science and partnerships with industry in FR. • Workshop on gender and MST (to be confirmed). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocard Group on Science Education.

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<p>5. Access and Social inclusion in lifelong learning:</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (May and December). <p><u>Meetings 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings (March, July and November/December). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September, seminar on disadvantaged youth in BE. • September 2006, Conference on Equity and Efficiency in education in FI. • October, PLA on preventative and compensatory measures against early school leaving in BE. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January, PLA on the Youth-reach, the School Completion and the Home School Liaison Service in IE. • April, PLA on desegregating education for Roma children – Hungary. • October, PLA on inclusive education policies in FR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication: Education and Migration (2008). 	
<p>6. Key Competences:</p> <p><u>Meetings in 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (May and October). <p><u>Meetings in 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings (March, June and November). 	<p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January, PLA on cross-curricular objectives in BE. • September, PLA on support for school in HU • October/November, 3rd PLA foreseen. • December, PLA on learning materials/cross-curricular competences in EL. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation process on schools (2007) and Communication on Modernising the School (2008). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PT Presidency Conference on Schools.
<p>7. ICT:</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (April and November) 2006. <p><u>Meetings in 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings (March, June and November). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January, PLA on Finnish virtual schools in FI. • September, PLA on building learning networks in LU. • Analysis of the ICT impact report. A review of studies of ICT impact in schools in Europe, elaborated by ESN. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April, PLA on the use of the structural fund to develop ICT infrastructure and brokerage of ICT based pedagogies in HU. • September, PLA on leadership and parental involvement in the UK. • Follow-up work on the Impact Report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation Green Paper (2007). • Report on the use of ICT to support innovation and lifelong learning for all (2007). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PT Presidency Conference on eLearning.

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<p>8. Recognition of learning outcomes:</p> <p><u>Meetings 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (May and December). <p><u>Meetings 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 meetings (March and December). 	<p><u>Activities 2006:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October, Peer Learning Seminar on “The impact of a learning-outcomes approach on education and training systems”. <p><u>Activities 2007:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January, PLA on quality assurance in validation of non-formal learning in BE. • June, seminar on NQF development (preparation for PLA in HU) in BE. • July, PLA on validation of non-formal learning in FR. • October, PLA on National Qualification Frameworks in HU. • January-December, Cedefop comparative study (32 countries) on the shift to learning outcomes. • January-December, update of European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. • July 07-July 08, Cedefop study on relationship education and occupation standards and the role of learning outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of EQF Recommendation (2007). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October, European conference on the shift to learning outcomes, Cedefop. • November, PT Presidency Conference on validation of non-formal learning and launch of EQF.