



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Education and Culture

Education and Vocational Training
Vocational training and adult education; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig

Brussels, 30/04/2013
EAC/B2/MNC/ff Ares (2013) 984301
File code:
EDUC_AP_AGENDA_EUR_ADULT_EDU.02

***Report on Meeting of National Coordinators for implementation of the
European Agenda for Adult Learning,
Brussels, 6 March 2013***

Adult Learning Policy in the overall context of Europe 2020 and ET 2020

The meeting was opened by Dana Bachmann, Head of the newly formed Unit for Vocational training and adult education; Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig. She briefly described the rationale behind the new organisation and how adult learning and VET, particularly C-VET would be brought more closely together. Merging the Adult Education and VET Units creates new synergies and new possibilities for cooperation across adult education and training. The new Unit has the mandate to take forward policy in all forms of adult learning, general and vocational, formal, non-formal and informal. This has also meant staff changes and reinforcement on policy files. The unit now has over thirty people most of whom are working on VET and adult learning policy issues. Ann Vanden Bulcke will now work with Martina Ní Cheallaigh to support and follow up of the National Coordinators (NCs). **Annex 1** gives the division of countries between them. Carlo Scatoli had also joined the Unit and is now coordinating the TWG on Quality.

The end of 2012 saw publication of an important set of documents under the title *Rethinking Education*. The Communication itself calls on Member States to strengthen the provision of transversal skills that increase employability such as entrepreneurial initiative, digital skills and foreign languages; reduce the number of low-skilled adults; scale up the use of ICT-supported learning and access to high quality OER, and strengthen the professional profile of teaching staff. These issues strengthen the relevance of NCs' work on the European Agenda for Adult Learning, and give them a central role in overall education and training policy.

Following up immediately on commitment to establishing a European alliance for modern, high-quality and attractive apprenticeships, announced in *Rethinking Education*, DG EAC and DG EMPL are working closely together in defining the concept for the Alliance and engaging with stakeholders. Similarly, the Communication *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan: Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe* (<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/>) was adopted in

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January 2013 with input from DG EAC on entrepreneurship education and skills, and the DG will be actively involved in its implementation.

The 2013 Annual Growth Survey, together with the Joint Employment Report and the Integrated Guidelines, adopted on 28 February, underline that economic recovery requires a balanced policy mix encompassing policies aimed at fighting unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis is one of Europe's challenges and key common priorities: almost 26 million people in the Union are out of work, nearly half of them for more than a year. In this context the Apprenticeship Alliances will be important as will the Youth Guarantee.

Issues of importance to policy at national Level

A number of countries reported that budgets and responding to the employment/unemployment challenges were of prime concern currently. This in effect is also forging close links between adult learning and VET in practice (HU, NL, HR where a responsible for VET and LLL has been appointed), and emphasising adult skills for work and to promote economic development (FR, UK). Cooperation between ministries of education and employment are important, and also at regional and local level in countries that have decentralised systems, (e.g. ES, IT), while stakeholder involvement and networking more generally is also being pursued (CH, EL, IT, SW). In BE (fl) working on NQF was found to be a useful networking opportunity. Use of the ESF to support adult learning is crucial but often difficult to achieve. In RO the National Qualifications Agency has plans to develop a national action plan for adult learning which incorporates implementation of the European Agenda, and in Iceland the IC 2020 strategy aims to reduce the number of low skilled to no more than 10%. LU has a new policy initiative on basic skills and SK a further education and adult guidance initiative, while a new Act is planned in EE.

CZ is now waiting for confirmation of allocation of current ESF funding for adult learning, while EE is planning for the new Structural Fund period. In LT and PO cooperation and coordination in using ESF is also a priority. It was underlined that all countries should be actively involved with the ESF counterparts at national level to secure some funding in the period 2014-2020 for more large-scale projects at national level.

Adult learning and basic skills are important in the overall policy agenda at national level as can be seen in the following examples, in particular. In **France**, in addition to 3-year regional plans to fight illiteracy, on 1 March the Prime Minister announced that he was taking up illiteracy as a national issue in 2013, under the label "*Agir ensemble contre l'illétrisme*". In **Slovenia** after much negotiation, a 2nd Adult Education Master Plan, 2012-2020 has been agreed following on from the 2005-2010 Master Plan. It proposes three main measures, which will be validated in the first half of 2013: literacy programmes, basic skills and key competences (non-formal education); formal education, recognition and validation; E&T to increase employability. **Finland** has set up a national youth guarantee in the form of the Young Adults' Skills Programme, which offers better opportunities for VET leading to a qualification (79 million € for 2013-2016). In **Norway** a quality plan for a provision of basic skills was agreed in December 2012. Aided by the Grundtvig grant, Vox is currently producing a roadmap towards a quality framework for provision of basic skills for adults which will support the plan. In **Denmark**, 2013 sees extra focus on general adult education and basic skills: in May with Adult Learners' Week and in September with a campaign for basic skills for unemployed. A conference on the PIAAC results is also planned. An

awareness raising campaign to encourage take-up of validation of non-formal and informal learning is underway. 13 regional education and training centres have been set up and a budget of €30 million spread over 4 years (2013-2016) has been allocated to strengthen adult guidance and counselling, contact with companies, basic skills & vocational training and better coordination of the training offer to employees and unemployed. Budget will be allocated on the basis of the number of low-skilled in the area.

Initial feedback from National Coordinators on their work in implementing the European Agenda

Participants agreed strongly that the designation of national coordinators in relation to for the European adult learning agenda raised the profile of adult learning policy in their countries and provided an opportunity for better coordination with other ministries and stakeholders. Adult learning is on national agendas and is increasingly emerging as a long-term development towards 2020.

Common focus appears to be on the low skilled and getting people back to work. Depending on governance structures in countries, NC nomination process varies greatly. In some countries, for example Estonia, where the ministry had initially decided to take on this role, it is now being transferred to ANDRAS, the Adult Education Association.

Being an NC has helped to get things moving national and regionally, and has provoked creation of new steering initiatives, ranging from small focus groups to comprehensive cross-ministerial committees. Having a European Agenda and grants also serve as a roadmap and an opportunity to concretise and focus objectives. How coordination is put into operation varies from country to country, in some the emphasis is on coordination dissemination, while in others the NC role is really being used to get stakeholders working together. The grant has been useful in establishing NCs and giving them some autonomy in their role. It is a learning process and there are challenges to bringing together all the facets and interests of stakeholders, and effectively examining their good practices. The challenge is even greater in countries with decentralised governance, where the regions have their own powers. But the regional dimension is emerging strongly even in countries with centralised systems, and some good practises can be exchanged. The coordination function is clearly including cooperation across general adult education, and VET, formal and non-formal education and training. Furthermore, coordination with other ministries, while difficult in some cases, is progressing.

While it is important to be aware of the different national contexts and the autonomous position of many adult learning stakeholders must be respected, things are on track and work is going according to plan. There are some limitations of having everything in English when it comes to dissemination. Going forward, some fundamental questions will have to be answered on how to spend ESF rather than the LLP grant to develop and enlarge this work. Other issues which emerged from the discussions include the role of NQF discussions in getting stakeholders talking together, guidance for adults and for lifelong learning, validation, and more stress on non-formal learning in Commission reporting and in the Annual Growth Survey.

See **Annex 2** policy overviews submitted by NCs following a request from António Silva Mendes in November 2012.

Thematic Working Groups on "Quality in Adult Learning" and "Financing Adult Learning"

Maike Koops and Carlo Scatoli gave a report on the activities of the two Thematic Working Groups on quality and financing of adult learning. A work-programme and timetable have been set out to arrive at a joint product from the results of the work of both groups.

The Thematic Working Groups on "Quality in Adult Learning" and "Financing Adult Learning" (TWGs) were established as OMC Groups in October 2011 for two years, following endorsement by the High Level Group which coordinates ET2020. The TWGs take their mandates from the recurring priority given to improving quality and efficiency of education in the Action Plan and Adult Learning, ET2020 work programme and in the European Agenda for Adult Learning. Until October 2013 both TWGs undertake an intensive programme of work involving group meetings, peer learning activities and conferences. The work of both groups will result in final reports, including policy recommendations.

In particular, the report on the Thematic Working Group on "Quality in Adult Learning" will include elements for a quality framework to support Member States and providers in their efforts to ensure high quality in adult learning. The report of the Thematic Working Group on Financing Adult Learning will focus on existing good practices and policy guidelines which aim at assisting Member States in improving the efficiency and coherence of financing adult learning.

To achieve these results, the TWGs have started a series of peer learning activities which will continue over the coming months (see details in **Annex 3** ppt). Non-participating countries can participate in and contribute to the PLAs. (see **Annex 4** on the state of play of both groups).

In relation to the TWG on Financing, Members of the Thematic Working Group will Contact the National Coordinators from their Country, while consultants will be contacting those NCs who are not participating in the TWG to check the country data and in some cases to seek complementary information.

NCs are invited to suggest themes for a working group that might start next year when the current groups have completed their mandates. It has been decided by the High Level Group working within the Council to limit groups to one group per sector in the future.

EU Adult Learning Agenda 2013

The Commission informed the meeting about the other main items in the 2013 work programme in relation to adult learning. An open call to tender has been published for EPAL (European Platform for Adult Learning). The closing date for receipt of tenders is 30 April.

Replying to questions Tapio Saavala said that EPAL would not overlap with existing platforms at national level. It would be a multilingual platform to put people in touch with peers, information and resources but would not try to duplicate information already out there. An interface with existing platforms might be an interesting feature of EPAL.

As a follow up to the work of the High Level Group on Literacy, and the Council Conclusions on Literacy of November 2012, the Commission will prepare a report on basic skills. It will be a co-production with the schools unit and cover basic skills across ages. The UK underlined the importance of incorporating family literacy in this report. The

Commission mentioned the study on family literacy completed in 2011, which is available at the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/literacy_en.pdf.

DG EAC will publish a Communication on Open Education Resources in 2013. Work is already being done by IPTS in Seville to inform this work. Building on the work of IPTS, the VET and adult education Unit will commission a study on OER and use of technology more generally by adult learners. NCs from EE, FR, HU, IRL, LU and UK drew attention to experiences in their countries that should be taken into consideration by this study. Finally, provision has been made for a more analytical study that would attempt to analyse the efficiency of existing policies that address the learning needs of those with educational levels under ISCED 3, and to identify the main gaps and bottle-necks and suggest possible solutions. It would evaluate the effectiveness and performance of adult learning provision in a restricted number of countries. Participants stressed the complexity and challenge that such a study would imply.

Views on any of these studies are welcome in writing.

NCs would also receive information about the seminar on Validation of non-formal and informal learning, Mechelen, 8-9 April 2013, and in due course on the Joint conference with UIL Hamburg under the Lithuanian Presidency, 9-10 December, in Vilnius.

Eurydice's Europedia contains information on adult learning. You are welcome to consult the pages at the following address:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurypedia_en.php.

Constructive feedback on improving the data is welcome, either to the Commission or your national contacts.

The chair reminded participants that it was important to be aware of other OMC actors in your countries and be aware of their work and what is happening in related fields and to feed your work into these activities also. Information from these related sources will also feed into your dissemination activities.

Electronic Platform to support work of NCs

Hélène Barry and Ramunas Kuncaitis from the EACEA presented a new platform developed as a closed virtual community for use and exchange of information by NCs and the Commission (DG EAC and EACEA). It is useful for exchange of good practices and news, as an archive for documents and to promote the visibility of activities in countries implementing the European Agenda for Adult Learning. In the future, the EACEA will enter information on financial rules and contractual matters on the platform. DG EAC and NC will also be able to input content directly. NCs should send the names and emails of the persons they wish to have access to the Community to Hélène Barry (helene.barry@ec.europa.eu).

Hélène Barry then gave advice and hints on drafting the financial progress reports which are due in September 2013 (**Annex 5** ppt). She emphasised that any significant deviation from the budget outlined in the contract would not be permitted unless an amendment to the contract was requested.

The next meeting will be organised by EACEA, in their premises, on 7 November. One of the objectives will be to give feedback on the progress reports.