

Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on competences supporting lifelong learning and the 'new skills for new jobs' initiative

(2010/C 135/03)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

1. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽¹⁾, which seeks to ensure that initial education and training offers all young people the means to develop the key competences to a level that equips them for further learning and working life and which allows adults to develop and update their key competences throughout their lives.
2. The Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on new skills for new jobs ⁽²⁾ and the Council conclusions of 9 March 2009 on new skills for new jobs — anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs ⁽³⁾, which focused on equipping people for new jobs within the knowledge society, and which acknowledged that skills, competences and qualification requirements would increase significantly and across all types and levels of occupation, and that there was a growing demand from employers for transversal key competences.
3. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ⁽⁴⁾, which encourages a shift away from the traditional emphasis on 'learning inputs' — such as the length of a learning experience, or type of institution — and towards an approach based on 'learning outcomes' — i.e. what a learner knows, understands and is able to do.
4. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 22 May 2008 on promoting creativity and innovation through education and training ⁽⁵⁾, which stressed the importance of the key competences framework for enhancing creativity and innovation, and which led to the *Manifesto for creativity and innovation in Europe* that was presented by the Ambassadors for the 2009 European Year of Creativity and Innovation.
5. The Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning ⁽⁶⁾ which highlighted the importance of adult learning as a key component of lifelong learning.
6. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on preparing young people for the 21st century ⁽⁷⁾, which emphasised that a coherent approach to competence development based on the European reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning implied the need for stronger efforts to improve reading literacy and other basic skills.
7. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) ⁽⁸⁾, which underlined that improving creativity and innovation was particularly important for VET and that to achieve this, the acquisition of key competences for lifelong learning should be actively promoted. The conclusions also aimed at improving the links between VET and the labour market by focusing on jobs and skills.
8. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 12 May 2009 on enhancing partnerships between education and training institutions and social partners, in particular employers, in the context of lifelong learning ⁽⁹⁾, which recommended that sufficient attention should be paid in education and training institutions at all levels to the acquisition of transversal key competences useful in professional life.
9. The Council conclusions of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders ⁽¹⁰⁾, which recognised that the demands placed on the teaching profession are imposing the need for new approaches and for teachers to take greater responsibility for updating and developing their own knowledge and skills.
10. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 26 November 2009 on developing the role of education in a fully-functioning knowledge triangle ⁽¹¹⁾, which encouraged education and training institutions to ensure that curricula, as well as teaching and examination methods at all levels of education, incorporate and foster creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 290, 4.12.2007, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ Doc. 6479/09.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 141, 7.6.2008, p. 17.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 140, 6.6.2008, p. 10.

⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 20.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 18, 24.1.2009, p. 6.

⁽⁹⁾ Doc. 9876/09.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 302, 12.12.2009, p. 6.

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 302, 12.12.2009, p. 3.

AND RECALLING IN PARTICULAR:

The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') ⁽¹⁾, which provide a means of addressing the challenges involved in fully implementing key competences and of improving the openness and relevance of education and training, including through the definition of priority work areas during the 2009-2011 work cycle, the possible development of a benchmark on employability and the adjustment of the coherent framework of indicators, paying special attention to the areas of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship,

AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES:

1. The current economic crisis, together with the rapid pace of social, technological and demographic change, underline the crucial importance of ensuring that — through high-quality lifelong education and training, as well as increased mobility — all individuals, in particular young people, acquire a strong set of competences.
2. Acquiring and further developing competences are crucial to improving employment prospects and contribute to personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship, since they signal the ability of individuals to act in a self-organised way in complex, changing and unpredictable contexts. As set out in the Key Competences Recommendation, a competent individual is able to combine knowledge, skills and attitudes, and to apply and make use of prior learning (whether acquired formally, non-formally or informally) in new situations.
3. The 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme recognises that:

— many countries are reforming curricula based explicitly on the key competences framework, particularly in the schools sector, but innovative approaches to teaching and learning need to be developed and implemented on a broader basis, in order to ensure that every citizen can have access to high-quality lifelong learning opportunities;

— there is a particular need to strengthen those competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market, which are often closely interrelated. This means further developing the key competences approach beyond the schools sector, into adult learning and into vocational education and training (VET) linked to the Copenhagen process, and ensuring that higher education outcomes are more relevant to the needs of the labour market. It also means developing ways of evaluating and recording transversal key competences — which are defined as including *learning to learn*, *social and civic competences*, *initiative-taking and entrepre-*

neurship, and *cultural awareness and expression* ⁽²⁾ — that are relevant for access to work and further learning;

- a 'common language' bridging the worlds of education/training and work needs to be developed in order to make it easier for citizens and employers to see how competences and learning outcomes are relevant to tasks and occupations. This would further facilitate citizens occupational and geographical mobility;
- in order to enhance citizens' competences and thus better equip people for the future, education and training systems also need to open up further and become more relevant to the outside world.

STRESSING THAT:

- The above challenges call for action at both European and national level, as part of the priority work areas specifically planned for the first 2009-2011 work cycle of ET 2020. The key competences approach needs to be fully implemented in the schools sector, particularly to support the acquisition of key competences and quality learning outcomes for those at risk of educational under-achievement and social exclusion. Teaching and assessment methods need to evolve, and the initial and continuing professional development of all teachers, trainers and school leaders needs to be supported, in line with the competence-based approach.
- However, there is now also a need to clarify, and to consider developing, the link between the various existing European initiatives aimed at strengthening citizen' competences and at providing a greater focus on learning outcomes, as well as to ensure a consistent approach in this field. This should build on the progress made with implementation of both the Key Competences Recommendation and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and should connect these to the acquisition of competences and learning outcomes in all relevant settings and at all levels. It should further aim at systematically improving and strengthening the acquisition of competences in education and training, as well as at work.

THEREFORE EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Efforts are needed to show how key competences are relevant at all levels of education and training and in all stages and situations of life. In addition to supporting the implementation of key competences in the areas identified by the 2006 Recommendation, attention should also be paid to making best use of the Recommendation in order to support lifelong learning beyond the end of compulsory education.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10, and OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 4.

- More should be done to support the acquisition, updating and further development of the full range of key competences in the areas of vocational education and training and of adult learning.

- In order to equip students with the competences required by the labour market, as well as for further learning and research activities, priority should also be given in higher education to the updating, acquisition and further development of key competences. It is particularly important that higher education institutions provide opportunities for students to develop the ability to communicate in foreign languages, as appropriate, as well as a strong set of transversal key competences, since these are essential for acquiring other skills, adapting to various working environments and being active citizens.

- Curriculum design, teaching, assessment, and learning environments should be consistently based on learning outcomes, i.e. the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired by learners. Particular emphasis should be placed on those transversal key competences that require cross-curricular and innovative methods. To achieve the transition to a competence-based approach, efforts should also be made to ensure that teachers, trainers and school leaders are equipped to take on the new roles implicit in such an approach. This process can be supported through enhanced partnerships between education and training institutions and the wider world, especially the world of work.

- More should also be done to adequately assess, record and provide evidence of the competences developed by citizens throughout their lives in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments for the purposes of employment and of access to further learning, as well as for active participation in society. Flexible pathways in education and training can improve citizens' employment opportunities, as well as facilitate the identification of their evolving competences and future learning needs. The effectiveness of tools for the identification and recording of competences could be enhanced if a standardised terminology and approach to classification could be adopted by all stakeholders in both education and training and the labour market,

- expertise and continuing support of Cedefop, this should include taking greater account of transversal key competences in curricula, assessment and qualifications; promoting creativity and innovation by developing specific teaching and learning methods; and developing partnerships between education and training providers, businesses and civil society.

- Support the initial and continuing professional development of all teachers, trainers and school leaders in general education, as well as in vocational education and training, including for the purpose of equipping them to take on the new roles implicit in a competence-based approach.

- Initiate work to clarify how key competences can be continuously developed and adapted to meet the challenges faced by individuals throughout their learning and working lives, by examining and developing *inter alia* the assessment of key competences at various levels of education and training. In particular, consideration should be given as to whether a link should be established between the learning outcomes-based reference levels promoted by Member States' implementation of the EQF and the key competences framework.

- Work, in collaboration with the social partners, public employment services and other stakeholders, on the development of a common language — or standardised terminology — covering European skills, competences and occupations (ESCO). This common language should aim to improve the articulation between competences acquired in learning processes and the needs of occupations and the labour market, and thereby bridge the worlds of education/training and work. It could both support and build on the implementation of the EQF, by facilitating the description, categorisation and classification of education and training provision, individual learning outcomes and experiences, as well as related employment opportunities. The overall purpose would be to make it easier for citizens, public employment services, careers counsellors, guidance providers and employers to see the relevance of learning outcomes in national qualifications to tasks and occupations, and to use the common language in order to better match skills needs to the labour market.

- INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:

- Support the exchange of best practices and national initiatives relating to the areas mentioned above. In line with the work areas planned for the first 2009-2011 work cycle of ET 2020, and making the best use of the

- Further develop and promote, in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, with a view to enabling citizens to engage in further learning and the labour market.

- Develop the Europass framework in line with the implementation of the EQF and with a view to recording and highlighting more effectively the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by citizens throughout their lives in a variety of learning settings, including by considering the development of a ‘personal skills passport’ based on existing Europass elements.
- Continue work on identifying emerging knowledge, skills and competences required for work and learning purposes, while taking into account the importance of career guidance systems, in order to support citizens in their endeavours to

find and create new and better jobs, and in order to measure and analyse potential skills mismatches,

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

Report back to the Council, by the end of 2011, on how the agenda set out in these conclusions could be further pursued, and work together with the Member States and interested stakeholders on its implementation in accordance with the priorities set out in the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, as well as in the context of the *Europe 2020* strategy.