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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training

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An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training

(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

Building higher skills through better education and training systems is an essential part of Europe's strategy to meet future challenges such as the ageing of society and to deliver the high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that are at the heart of the Lisbon strategy. Knowledge, skills and competences determine an individual's chances to succeed in the labour market and to have an active role in society. They are crucial for social cohesion as well as the competitiveness and innovative capacity of enterprises and the entire economy.

As set out in the initiative on *New Skills for New Jobs*, also published with this year's Lisbon package, labour market changes will require both upgrading the skills of the population and skills development policies that better match current and future labour market needs. This will only happen if lifelong learning becomes a reality, not a slogan, allowing people to acquire key competences early and update skills throughout their lives; and if education and training systems become more responsive to change and more open to the wider world.

EU Member States and the Commission have been cooperating closely to support national reforms of education and training systems through the "Education & Training 2010" work programme. While taking into account Member States' very different starting points, the open method of coordination (OMC) has supported progress towards a set of shared objectives measured against common indicators and benchmarks and in line with the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs, aimed at increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills, facilitating innovation, and promoting a more entrepreneurial culture¹. The current framework for cooperation, which was agreed by the Education Council in 2001/02, is coming to an end and this is an appropriate point to take stock and look ahead.

Following a wide consultation with Member States and other actors during 2008, this Communication suggests long-term strategic challenges to guide the policy cooperation for the period to 2020. The challenges reflect the contribution of education and training to the Lisbon Strategy and the renewed Social Agenda. The Communication also outlines the most urgent priorities which merit particular attention during the initial period ahead, for 2009 and 2010. This, together with improved working methods, will strengthen the focus on implementation and make the new framework more flexible to address both certain long-identified weaknesses

¹ Guidelines 23, 24, 8, 15.

and to open policy cooperation on new challenges. It also includes the possibility to refocus later, in the light of progress made, to reflect new issues as they emerge in the policy dialogue and to adapt objectives, benchmarks and reporting mechanisms as necessary in the light of decisions that will be taken on the future Growth and Jobs strategy beyond 2010.

At this time when the EU is seeking to minimise the impact of the current economic downturn and set the course for renewed growth, it is vital that the momentum in favour of educational investment that is both efficient and equitable is maintained. Good policies will simultaneously aid recovery from recent shocks and build the basis for meeting future challenges with confidence.

2. WHERE DO WE STAND?

2.1. Progress and challenges

Responsibility for education and training policy lies with Member States. Europe's role is to support the improvement of national systems through complementary EU-level tools, mutual learning and exchange of good practice.

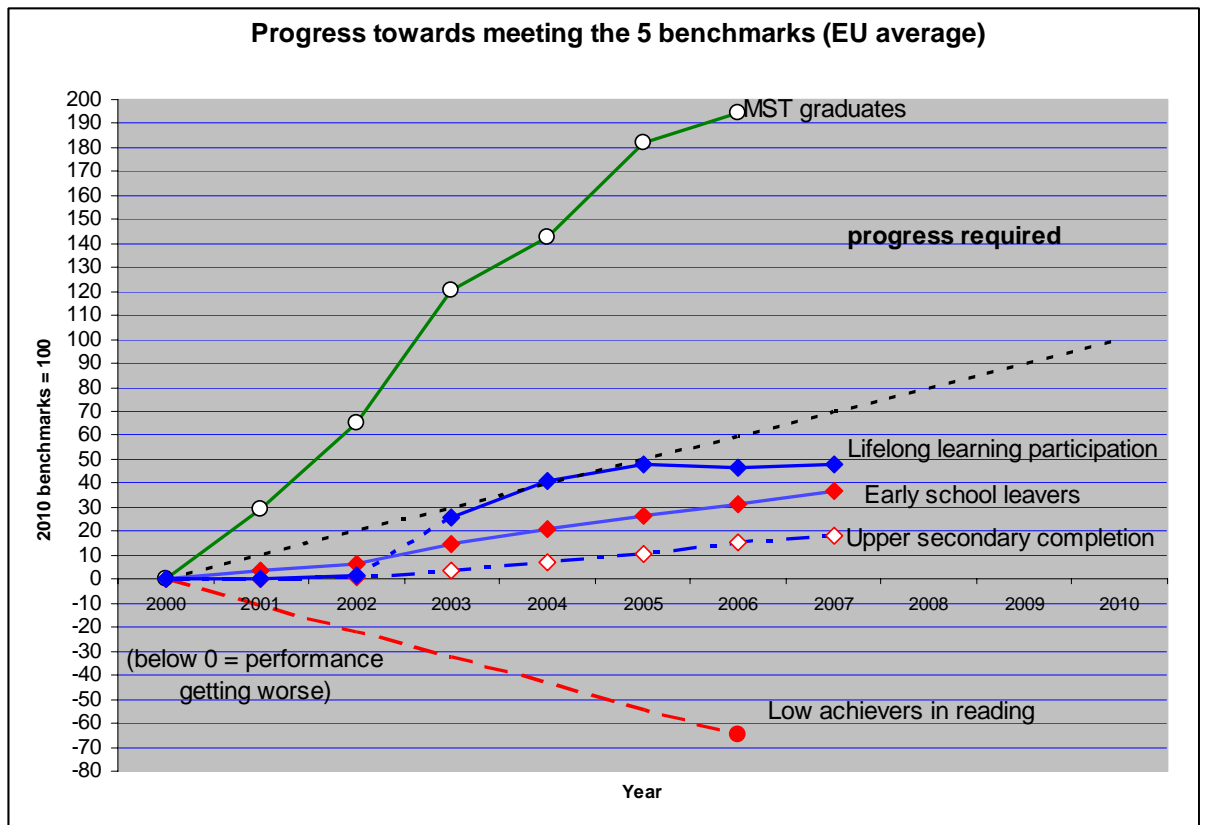
Policy cooperation on education and training has supported national reforms of lifelong learning and qualification systems, the modernisation of higher education and the development of European instruments promoting quality, transparency of qualifications and mobility in learning. But progress varies considerably between Member States and is insufficient in key areas. Implementation therefore needs to be strengthened. As shown in chart 1, most of the benchmarks that the Council set for 2010 will not be reached. While the maths, science and technology benchmark was reached in 2003, progress on early-school leaving, upper-secondary attainment and adult participation in lifelong learning is insufficient to reach the targets. Performance on low achievers in reading literacy has even deteriorated².

The 2008 Spring European Council therefore urged Member States to take concrete action to reduce substantially the number of people who cannot read properly and the number of early school leavers, to improve the achievement levels of learners with a migrant background or from disadvantaged groups, to attract more adults into continuing education and training and to further facilitate geographic and occupational mobility³.

² OJ C 86, 5.4.2008, p. 1; SEC(2008) 2293.

³ European Council Conclusions March 2008, para. 15.

Chart 1: Progress towards meeting the 5 benchmarks for 2010 (EU average)⁴



2.2. European education and training systems in a worldwide perspective

Seen in a wider perspective, the EU's education and training performance is broadly comparable with the best in the world. But comparisons with other OECD countries reveal significant backlogs for the EU, both at the level of basic schooling and in higher education.

Most notably, PISA results for reading literacy (15-year-olds) show that the EU as a whole has an increasing share of low performers. Chart 2 shows that the share in South Korea, Canada and Australia is relatively stable and far below the EU average. Migrant populations – which perform badly on this indicator within the EU⁵ – succeed notably better in Canada and Australia. Chart 3 shows that some EU Member States perform at a level comparable to the best in the world. But given the poor performance of some other Member States, this remains a substantial, European-level challenge.

⁴ Latest data for MST graduates, low achievers in reading: 2006. Others: 2007.

⁵ COM(2008) 423.

Chart 2: Low achievers in reading (at age 15) on the PISA reading literacy scale in the EU and selected third countries 2000 and 2006 (Data source: OECD)

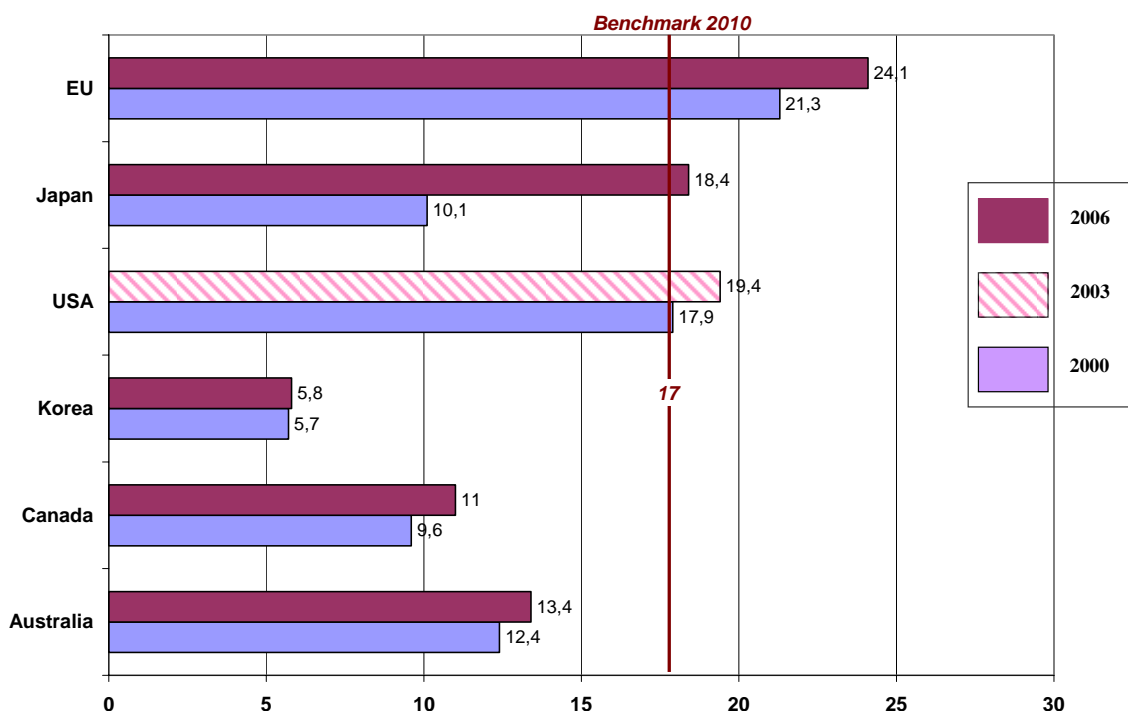
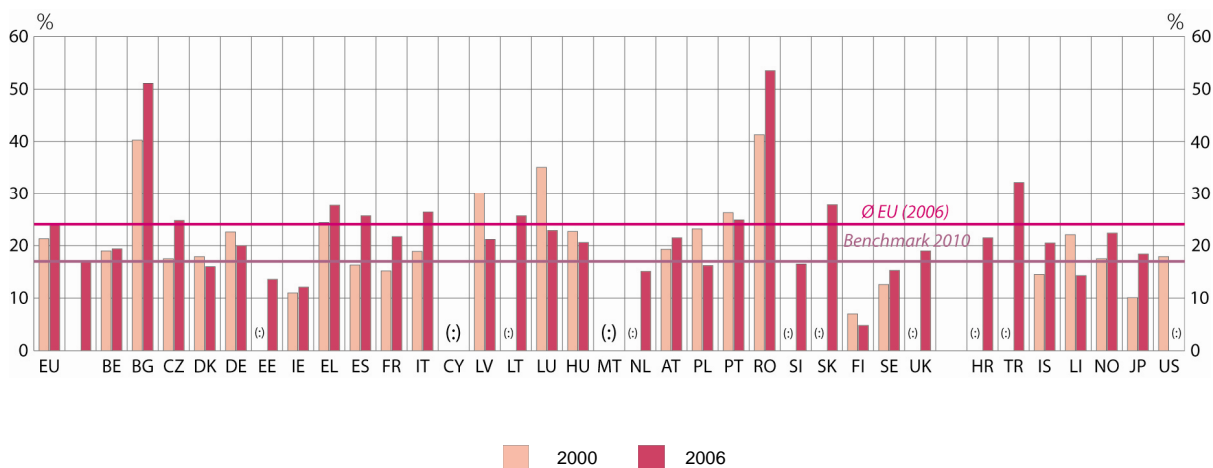


Chart 3: Low achievers in reading (at age 15) on the PISA reading literacy scale in the EU 2000 and 2006 (Data source: OECD)



Secondly, many of the EU's key competitors have higher shares of people with tertiary level educational attainment. The EU average for 25-64 years old is 23% compared to 40% for Japan, 39% for the USA, 32% for Australia and Korea and 27% for New Zealand.

Finally, while ensuring the efficiency of investments is a key concern for the EU, many countries outside Europe are investing significantly more in higher education,

in particular from private sources. Private investment (0.23% of GDP in the EU) is much higher in both Japan (0.76%) and the USA (1.91%)⁶.

These comparisons show that if Europe is to succeed in its ambition to be the world's leading knowledge economy and society, it must step up its performance in these areas.

3. LONG-TERM STRATEGIC CHALLENGES AND IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES: RAISING SKILLS LEVELS THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING

On the basis of its consultations, the Commission proposes that European cooperation in education and training should address four strategic challenges in the years to 2020:

- Make **lifelong learning and learner mobility** a reality;
- Improve the **quality and efficiency** of provision and outcomes;
- Promote **equity and active citizenship**;
- Enhance **innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship**, at all levels of education and training.

These challenges should be addressed in a joined-up policy across the systems as a whole (schools, higher education, vocational education and training/VET and adult learning). Lifelong learning is therefore a fundamental perspective underpinning all the above challenges.

While these strategic challenges should form the basis for policy cooperation for the period 2009-2020, more specific objectives should be established for priority attention in shorter term blocks. The following sections 3.1 to 3.4 set out the long term strategic challenges in more detail and propose relevant priorities for the first period, 2009-2010.

3.1. Strategic challenge: Make lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality

Lifelong learning comprises learning at all ages (from pre-primary to post-retirement) and in all contexts, i.e. including formal, non-formal or informal settings. Member States agreed to put in place by 2006 coherent and comprehensive national lifelong learning strategies.

Implementing such strategies remains a challenge. Progress has been made as a result of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)⁷ which triggered development work on national qualification frameworks in many countries, including a new focus on learning outcomes (i.e. on what a learner knows, understands and is able to do rather than the learning process itself). By increasing the transparency of

⁶ SEC(2008) 2293, pp. 69, 89, 148.

⁷ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

qualifications, the EQF will facilitate the mobility of learners and workers between countries and their access to lifelong learning.

However, much remains to be done to establish flexible learning pathways, e.g. through better transitions between VET and higher education, opening universities to non-traditional learners or the validation of non-formal learning. Learning must be attractive and accessible for all citizens, independent of age, educational attainment, employment or social status. Better coordination between different education and training sectors, institutional commitment (including sustainable models of funding) and partnership with all stakeholders is required.

Learner mobility between countries is an essential element of lifelong learning and for building people's employability and adaptability. Evaluations of the EU programmes show that mobility breaks down barriers between people and groups, makes the benefit of European citizenship more tangible and helps people become more adaptable and open to mobility when they enter the labour market. Cross-border learner mobility should become the norm, rather than the exception that it is today. A new commitment of all actors, together with more broadly-based funding will be required to achieve this.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10:

Member States and the Commission should give priority to achieving better implementation of

- **Lifelong learning strategies:** Complete the process of implementation of national lifelong learning strategies, giving particular attention to the validation of non-formal and informal learning and guidance.
- **European Qualifications Framework:** Link all national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010 and support the use of an approach based on learning outcomes for standards and qualifications, assessment and validation procedures, credit transfer, curricula and quality assurance.

Member States and the Commission should focus on developing the policy cooperation on

- **Expanding learning mobility:** Work together to eliminate barriers and expand opportunities for learning mobility within Europe and worldwide, both for higher and other levels of education, including new targets and financing instruments at the European and national levels⁸.

3.2. Strategic challenge: Improve the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes

The European Council has frequently stressed that high quality education and training systems which are both efficient and equitable are crucial for Europe's success.

⁸ Council Conclusions of 20/21.11.2008 on youth mobility.

The major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences⁹ by everyone, while developing the excellence that will allow Europe to retain a strong global role in higher education. Learning outcomes at all levels must be relevant for professional and private life.

The quality of teachers, trainers and other educational staff is the most important within-school factor affecting student performance¹⁰. With around two million older teachers to be replaced in the next 15 years, the teaching profession must become a more attractive career choice¹¹.

To provide high quality outcomes on a sustainable basis, the governance of education and training systems must also be addressed. Education and training institutions should be given greater autonomy, should be more open to the civil society and enterprises and should be subject to effective systems of quality assurance.

High quality will only be achieved with an efficient and sustainable use of resources. The case for investment in education and training as a factor essential for economic growth and social inclusion should be strengthened by developing the evidence base¹².

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10

Member States and the Commission should give priority to achieving better implementation in the following fields

- **Languages:** To enable citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue, promote language teaching in VET and for adult learners and give migrants the opportunity to learn the language of the host country¹³.
- **Professional development of teachers and trainers:** Focus on key elements of teachers' initial training and on expanding the range and quality of the continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, trainers and staff involved, for example, in leadership or guidance activities.
- **Governance and funding:** Implement the modernisation agenda for higher education (including curricula)¹⁴, the quality assurance framework for VET¹⁵ and develop standards for adult learning professionals. Promote evidence-based policy and practice,¹⁶ with a particular emphasis on establishing the case for sustainability of public and private investment.

⁹ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

¹⁰ COM(2007) 392.

¹¹ Council Conclusions of 15 November 2007, OJ C 300, 12.12.2007, p. 6.

¹² COM(2006) 481.

¹³ COM(2008) 566.

¹⁴ COM(2006) 208.

¹⁵ COM(2008) 179.

¹⁶ SEC(2007) 1098.

Member States and the Commission should focus on developing the policy cooperation on

- **Basic skills in reading, mathematics and science:** Set up a high-level group on literacy to investigate the problems behind the decline in reading performance among school pupils¹⁷ and make recommendations to improve literacy levels across the EU. Intensify existing cooperation to improve the take-up of maths and science at higher levels of education and training, and to strengthen science teaching. Member States should consider establishing national action plans for achievement in basic skills, including for adults.
- **"New Skills for New Jobs":** Ensure that the assessment of future skill requirements and the matching of labour market needs are fully taken on board in all education and training planning processes.

3.3. Strategic challenge: Promote equity and active citizenship

Education and training policy should enable all citizens, irrespective of age, gender and socio-economic background, to acquire, update and develop over a lifetime both job-specific skills and the key competences needed to foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue.

Despite the fact that questions of equity have been central to the OMC on Education and Training from the outset, the main, central challenges remain. Every sixth young person still leaves school with only compulsory education attainment level or below. Many learners with a migrant background succeed less well in education and training than their native peers. While boys drop out of school more often and perform less well in reading, women are underrepresented among graduates in maths, science and technology. Adults with low education attainment are seven times less likely to be engaged in continuing education and training than those with high attainment levels. A learner's socio-economic background still has an important impact on his/her chances to access and succeed in education and training at whatever level¹⁸. These are major challenges which need to be addressed to promote social inclusion and to overcome bottlenecks in labour supply.

Educational disadvantage can be addressed by high quality pre-primary education and targeted support, which must be combined with properly-managed inclusion in mainstream education and training.

Education should promote intercultural skills, democratic values, the respect of fundamental rights and the fight against discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.

¹⁷ SEC(2008) 2293.

¹⁸ SEC(2008) 2293.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10

Member States and the Commission should give priority to achieving better results in

- **Early school leaving:** Strengthen preventive approaches, build closer cooperation between general and vocational sectors and remove barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training.

Member States and the Commission should focus on developing the policy cooperation on

- **Pre-primary education:** Promote generalised equitable access and reinforce quality of provision and teacher support.
- **Migrants:** Develop mutual learning on best practices for education of children from a migrant background¹⁹.
- **Learners with special needs:** Promote personalised learning through timely support and well coordinated services. Integrate services within mainstream schooling and ensure pathways to further education and training.

3.4. Strategic challenge: Enhance innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

Innovation and creativity are key factors in enterprise development and crucial to Europe's ability to face the challenges of international competition and sustainable development.

A first challenge is to ensure that all citizens can acquire transversal key competences such as learning-to-learn and communication skills, a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, digital competence (incl. media literacy²⁰), cultural awareness and expression²¹. These and the use of new technologies – Member States should aim to make high-speed internet available to all schools by 2010²² – must be reflected in curricula, pedagogies and qualifications. Enhanced university-business cooperation will stimulate entrepreneurial mindsets among students and researchers.

The second challenge is to ensure a fully functioning knowledge triangle of education-research-innovation. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology can inspire and drive change to achieve excellence in teaching and research, in particular by encouraging multi-disciplinarity, partnerships between education institutions and business. Partnership between the world of enterprise and different levels and sectors of education, training and research can help to ensure a better focus on the skills and competences required in the labour market and on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in all forms of learning. The creation of a European

¹⁹ COM(2008) 423.

²⁰ COM(2007) 833.

²¹ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

²² European Council conclusions March 2008, para. 7; see also SEC(2008) 2629 and COM(2007) 833 on media literacy.

Research Area and a landscape of world-class clusters should facilitate many such partnerships.

The European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009 will help to address some of the key challenges. In the context of developing the policy cooperation, research, analysis and the exchange of ideas on how to measure creative and innovative skills needs to be promoted at EU level and with the relevant international organisations.

Priority themes to be highlighted in 2009-10

Member States and the Commission should give priority to achieving better implementation of

- **Transversal key competences:** Integrate transversal key competences fully into curricula, assessment and qualifications²³.

Member States and the Commission should focus on developing the policy cooperation on

- **Innovation-friendly institutions:** Promote creativity and innovation through developing specific teaching and learning methods (including the use of new ICT tools and teacher training).
- **Partnership:** Develop partnerships between education and training providers and businesses, research institutions, cultural actors and creative industries.

4. IMPROVED WORKING METHODS FOR THE FUTURE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION

The success of the open method of coordination in education and training depends on political commitment and on its capacity to support and have a real impact on national reforms. The policy cooperation should be relevant and concrete, should produce visible results and reach stakeholders and policy makers, including at the highest political level. Measuring progress towards agreed objectives is key.

4.1. Governance and partnership

The lifelong learning perspective calls for coordination and priority setting across different education and training sectors. Specific policy agendas have been set out for schools²⁴, VET²⁵, higher²⁶ and adult education²⁷. Policy exchange and implementation work in all sectors must contribute to overall strategic priorities.

To this end, the role of the existing informal high level group on education and training policy should be reinforced, to allow it to play a strategic role in steering the

²³ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

²⁴ COM(2008) 425.

²⁵ Council Conclusions on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation on Vocational Education Training (VET) of 20/21 November 2008.

²⁶ COM(2006) 208 and the intergovernmental Bologna process.

²⁷ COM(2006) 614; COM(2007) 558.

OMC by: identifying priorities and monitoring the progress of work across all sectors; preparing inputs for policy discussions in the Education Council, for example, based on peer learning or review activities; and by ensuring that the policy cooperation on education and training is given due account both in the wider Lisbon process and in national policies.

Priority should also be given to a greater involvement of stakeholders and social and civil society partners, who have a considerable contribution to make both in the policy dialogue and in implementation. The Commission will hold an annual forum with European stakeholder organisations and relevant stakeholders will be systematically involved in peer learning activities.

4.2. Mutual learning, transfer of innovation and policy development

Mutual learning is a central element of the OMC in education and training. It provides input for European policy initiatives and support to national policy development. And it is an important means for disseminating and implementing European tools and instruments, such as the European Qualifications Framework²⁸ or the recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning²⁹.

For the future, the aim should be to strengthen peer learning in order to ensure that it fully reflects the priority challenges identified above and to increase its impact at the political level. Activities need to be based on clear mandates, time-schedules and planned outputs (e.g. policy recommendations or handbooks, compendia of examples of best practice). It should be flexible enough to change and adapt to emerging issues and evolving policy themes. A rolling programme of peer learning and review based on the evolving policy priorities should be developed, starting with those defined for 2009-10.

In addition, the following instruments will also be used:

- The Lifelong Learning Programme³⁰ will support the development, testing, transfer and implementation of new approaches and innovation.
- Agencies such as Cedefop and the European Training Foundation, networks such as Eurydice, and expert groups³¹, including collaboration with the relevant international organisations, will support research and analysis.
- The policy dialogue with several external partner countries can provide a wider comparative framework and fresh ideas: it should be reinforced and better linked to the OMC.

²⁸ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

²⁹ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

³⁰ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 45.

³¹ This includes the Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL), the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) and the expert networks of economists and social scientists in education (EENEE, NESSE).

4.3. Better reporting of progress and visibility

The Commission and the Council currently issue a joint progress report every two years based on national reports from the Member States which chart their policy actions to address the OMC's overall objectives. Future reports should focus in greater detail on certain specific priorities for action. Thus, it is proposed that the next joint progress report, due for 2010, should focus on one or more of the immediate priorities highlighted in section 3. The joint reports should be further strengthened by including assessments of the situation in individual countries, which will in turn feed into the assessment of the education, training and skills components of the Lisbon National Reform Programmes. As of now, no change in the reporting rhythm – every 2 years – is proposed.

Further efforts should be made to raise awareness, at the European, national and regional levels, of the support and opportunities provided by the open method of coordination in education and training, particularly its priorities and results. A website will provide information about policy initiatives and concrete examples of best practice identified in the context of the OMC.

4.4. Indicators and benchmarks

The existing five benchmarks

The indicators and benchmarks developed in the context of the Education and Training 2010 work programme have proved to be useful in monitoring and communicating progress at the European level and in providing guidance for the identification of challenges. Three of these five benchmarks (on early school leavers, upper secondary attainment and adult participation in lifelong learning) form part of the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs.

As shown in section 2.1, progress towards meeting the five benchmarks set for 2010 has been insufficient. It is therefore important that efforts to improve performance in these areas are accelerated. To this end, Member States should adopt national targets in the areas where European benchmarks have been agreed.

Updating the benchmarks beyond 2010

For the period to 2020, policy cooperation should be supported by benchmarks which fully reflect the identified long term strategic challenges and which reflect a key aspect of the New Skills for New Jobs agenda - the need to upgrade skills and employability across the population as a whole. The future education and training benchmarks should also be sufficiently flexible to take account of the targets and indicators which will be used in the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs beyond 2010–Lisbon post 2010. On this basis, it is proposed that the Commission and Member States should build on experience with the existing benchmarks and explore a new set of benchmarks along the following lines:

- Review and where appropriate update the existing benchmarks, e.g. a possible extension of the benchmark on low achievers in reading skills to include also mathematics and science;

- Incorporate into the benchmarks framework targets that were set by the Barcelona European Council of 2002 (i.e. on participation in pre-primary education and on access to early language teaching);
- Introduce benchmarks building on themes which have emerged since the start of the cooperation or reflecting new political priorities e.g. in tertiary level attainment; learning mobility;
- Launch development work to create new indicators on the link between education attainment and employability and on education for innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship.

Accordingly, the Commission would propose a debate with the Member States on the basis of the following possible benchmarks for the future OMC:

4.4.1. *Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality*

- *Adult participation in lifelong learning:* The existing benchmark foresees a participation rate of 12.5% of adults (aged 25-64) in lifelong learning. While there has been reasonable progress towards meeting this benchmark since 2002 (on current trends, the benchmark is likely to be achieved about 2017), it remains patchy and uneven between Member States. Given technological and demographic trends and the inevitable impact of the current economic downturn on jobs, it is even more urgent to upgrade and update the skills of adults. Consequently, the Commission would propose to raise the benchmark to participation of 15 % of adults in lifelong learning. It is important also that Member States should reduce the imbalance in participation between low and high skilled adults participation in lifelong learning; they should be invited to set national targets to do so.
- *Mobility:* a new benchmark should be developed on the basis of the conclusions of the Education and Youth Council of November 2008 which propose objectives for mobility of university students, school pupils, the vocational sector and teachers and trainers.

4.4.2. *Improving the quality and efficiency of provision and outcomes*

- *Low achievers in basic skills:* Following the 2008 Spring European Council which urged Member States to take concrete action to tackle this problem, the Commission would propose a benchmark that the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in basic skills (reading, mathematics and science) should be lower than 15% on average and that particular attention should be given to reducing gender imbalances. The aim would be to widen the scope of the previous literacy-only benchmark without raising the threshold.
- *Languages:* The Commission would propose a new benchmark that at least 80% of pupils in lower secondary education should be taught at least two foreign languages. This proposal would seek to deliver on the demand of the Barcelona European Council to provide teaching in at least two foreign languages from an early age. There has recently been rapid growth in language teaching in early education. In 2000, 40% of pupils in early school education were receiving tuition

in two foreign languages; by 2006 (most recent figures available), this had risen to 52%. The aim would be to further stimulate this good progress.

- *Investment in higher education:* The Commission would propose a new benchmark that public and private investment in modernised higher education should reach at least 2% of GDP³². This would reflect the policy discussions on modernising higher education since the Hampton Court Summit of 2005 and would seek to bring investment levels in higher education (currently 1.3% of GDP from public and private sources) closer to the levels of key competitors such as the US and Japan, whose investment (public and private) stands at 2.45% and 1.85% respectively.
- *Tertiary level attainment:* The Commission would propose a new benchmark that the share of 30-34 year olds with high educational attainment should be at least 45%. This proposal reflects the current upward trend in the share of 30-34 year olds with high educational attainment but would, as above, seek to encourage policies to bring EU performance (currently 30%) closer to the levels of key competitors such as the US and Japan (participation rates for the nearest comparable age group 25-34 are 39% and 54% respectively). The existing benchmark on the numbers of Maths, Science and Technology graduates has been reached and could be discontinued; however, the gender imbalance in such studies should continue to be monitored.
- *Employability:* The Commission would propose to explore the development of a new benchmark linked to the labour market participation of people with different levels of educational attainment. Labour market success is strongly linked to a person's level of educational attainment and, as explained in the Commission's Communication on "New Skills for New Jobs", will be even more so in the future. This would have the aim of strengthening the contribution of education and training systems to the Lisbon agenda.

4.4.3. Promoting equity and active citizenship

- *Pre-primary education:* The Commission would propose a new benchmark at least 90% of young children should participate in pre-primary education (4 years old). The EU average rate of participation is already approaching 90%, but this overall high level of participation masks significant variations in national performance. This proposal would seek to support progress towards the demand of the Barcelona European Council that childcare be provided in respect of 90% of children.
- *Early school leavers:* The Commission would propose to maintain unchanged the existing benchmark that not more than 10% of the population aged 18-24 should have only lower-secondary education and not be in education and training. The proposal to leave the benchmark unchanged reflects the fact that progress towards this mark, since its adoption in 2002, has been slow. The Commission would hope for a stronger focus on the implementation of policies to make real progress towards this key benchmark. Reflecting this need to concentrate on

³²

COM(2005) 152.

implementation, the closely linked benchmark on upper secondary completion could be discontinued.

4.4.4. *Enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training*

- *Innovation and creativity*: The Commission would propose to develop indicators and explore with Member States the feasibility of developing a benchmark to address how education systems promote innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship. The exchanges to be undertaken during 2009, the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, should help with the reflection on what is a very new area of policy exchange.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Education and training policy remains crucial to achieving growth and jobs, social inclusion and active citizenship but continues to face important challenges. Progress on key educational issues such as literacy and early school leaving is slower than hoped. The current focus on the economic crisis must not divert attention from setting the right long-term, strategic education and training policies. As highlighted in this communication, Europe has to address a number of educational deficits if it is to avoid falling behind globally. For these reasons, there is, more than ever, a need for an effective open method of coordination supporting the improvement of education and training policies.

The Commission calls upon the Council to endorse this proposed framework for the future European cooperation in education and training, the set of long-term strategic challenges until 2020 and priority issues for the period 2009-2010 and the proposed improved working methods.

The framework should be reviewed and any necessary adjustments made in the light of the decisions taken on the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs beyond 2010.