

LLL Response to Future of Learning Package

Building bridges between all forms and sectors of education is the future of learning in Europe

The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes the prominence given to education and training at the EU level in recent months. At the Gothenburg Social Summit on 17 November, EU leaders had an informal lunch [debate](#) on education and culture for the first time. In the run-up to this debate, the European Commission set out a vision for a European Education Area by 2025 in the [Communication](#) “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture”. The Commission followed this with the launch of a new [Future of Learning package](#) in January this year and the same month the first ever European Education Summit took place in Brussels, gathering over 20 national Ministers for Education to discuss equity and diversity in education.

The Lifelong Learning Platform views these developments as a positive step forward for EU-level cooperation in the field of education and training. This momentum should continue with a clear commitment from Member States and a concrete follow-up to the ambitious discussions at the Education Summit. We wish to stress, however, that the follow-up steps taken by the European Commission and Member States should be rooted in a holistic vision of education, which means *looking at education in its universal scope and not exclusively at one specific sector (e.g. schools) or at the sole purpose of labour market demands*. This is why we call for a **European Lifelong Learning Area** which encompasses all levels, sectors and forms of learning - formal, non-formal and informal - in order to truly be of benefit to all EU citizens. After all, not all young people are students and not all students are young people - we need education policies that match this 21st century reality.

In such a reality we must remember that personal and professional development, soft and technical skills, are equally important for the society of today and tomorrow and require a social and humanistic approach that not only focuses on STEM disciplines, digital skills and entrepreneurship. In a fast changing society, learning fundamental skills for developing independent critical thinking, becoming responsible, active citizens and the capacity to navigate across cultures and political orientations is of paramount importance.¹ We strongly encourage the Council to rectify and review the focus of skills and competences

¹ See also [EUA response to the 2018 Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#)

including political, social and humanistic skills into the revised key competences framework and overall approach to building a European Lifelong Learning Area.

Key competences, digital skills and the European dimension of education

The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes the timely initiatives included in the Future of Learning package and believe that they have many promising elements, although they fall short in a number of aspects that we would like to see strengthened.

We appreciate that the proposal for a [revised Key Competences framework](#) takes into consideration different target groups and forms of learning and that it establishes a clear link with the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights² and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4³. However, experts and civil society organisations involved in previous consultations would have expected a more in-depth revision to reflect the interconnected nature of skills, current realities of the EU and 21st century education needs. The upgrade of *civic competence* as a competence in its own right is a positive development; in the current climate of populism and xenophobia, learners need to gain an understanding of democratic values and how to critically assess different attitudes, values and media in all its forms. That said, we note with concern that the previous ‘learning to learn’ competence has been merged with other competences in the new framework, as this could risk undermining its importance. ***To ensure people’s resilience and ability to adapt to social, economic and other forms of change, they must learn how to learn - this is a prerequisite for acquiring all the other competences.*** This also requires a rethink of how the full range of key competences are assessed - standardised testing only evaluates a narrow range of competences and incentivises “teaching for the test”, thus restricting the full potential of the framework⁴. Further to this, the emphasis on STEM versus social and humanistic competences undermines the importance of the latter in supporting individuals’ ability to cope with complex and interrelated global developments, hence we feel that **STEAM** (A for Arts) would be a more relevant approach to stress in the revised framework.

Crucially, the Lifelong Learning Platform urges the European Commission to reflect further on ***how to promote the full implementation of these revised key competences at the national level*** and to give further support to Member States in this process. Good examples of how to operationalise the framework in different sectors of education need to be compiled and serve as a basis for building on the work carried out so far, particularly in non-formal and informal learning environments where implementation of the previous framework has not been adequately supported.

As regards the Council Recommendation on [common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching](#), we agree with the principles underpinning the proposal but stress that it needs to

² Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market (full list of principles [here](#))

³ “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”

⁴ [LLL reaction to the Key Competences framework for Lifelong Learning review](#)

apply to education across all forms and sectors. While school education is undoubtedly important for promoting the acquisition of social and civic competences, active citizenship and respect for diversity, it would be a missed opportunity not to extend this to learners from other sectors (e.g. VET, higher education) and adults⁵ in particular. ***While the education of children and young people can lay an solid foundation in this area, any efforts aimed at promoting common values through education should include the adults of today who serve as multipliers in their families, workplaces and communities.*** Moreover, the Recommendation should encourage Member States to mainstream a “whole school approach” into their education policies, taking note of and acting on the messages from the ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy on the value of this approach.⁶

We continue to emphasise the importance of non-formal and informal learning in promoting common values and social inclusion among learners of all ages. We note that the emphasis on non-formal learning included in the original [roadmap](#) for the Recommendation has largely disappeared; therefore, ***we urge Member States to broaden its scope to the non-formal and informal learning as providers in this area, particularly civil society organisations, are in a strategic position for reaching out to the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society.*** In this respect, partnerships between such providers and the formal education sector should be encouraged and supported.

Teachers and professional educators have a direct impact on learners’ achievement, therefore their training and professional development is crucial. This Recommendation and indeed the overall package need to go further in addressing this with a holistic and forward-looking approach, preparing our education systems for a future where the role of teachers and professional educators will drastically change from “teacher as knowledge owner” to “teacher as facilitator”. At the same time, while professional development in the formal education sector is undoubtedly important, we insist that the package should address the equally urgent need for non-formal providers, as well as informal ones including parents, to have opportunities for skills development and should seek to empower all educators, particularly teachers and professional educators, to be able to cooperate with their counterparts in other learning sectors.

Similar arguments apply to the [Digital Education Action Plan](#). While it makes welcome and useful proposals for supporting innovation and digital infrastructure for educational establishments, we call for a greater emphasis on support for vulnerable individuals in their digital learning experience and recognition of the valuable role that providers of non-formal and informal education play in this regard. The Action Plan outlines a specific set of initiatives to be implemented by 2020 but this should not prevent Member States from considering a more long-term vision about the role of digital technology in their education, training and lifelong learning systems. Furthermore, while the Action Plan states that “Access to and the use of digital technologies can help reduce the learning gap between students from high and low socio-backgrounds”, the reality is that this does not happen automatically because ***not all learners start from the same foundation in basic skills.*** Therefore, targeted support measures, investment and a

⁵ [EAEA Response to Future of Learning Package](#)

⁶ [ET2020 Schools Policy: Policy messages on a whole school approach to tackling early school leaving](#)

learner-centred approach are necessary to ensure that everyone, regardless of age, background or level of educational attainment, is able to keep pace with and benefit from the digital age. Robust support for teachers and educators in making effective use of digital technologies, and developing their digital competences throughout their careers, needs to be a long-term priority as well.⁷

An issue that spans across all three initiatives, and which the Lifelong Learning Platform considers of crucial importance, is the need for Member States to continue their efforts in adopting and implementing an effective validation system for non-formal and informal learning, as called for by the 2012 Council Recommendation.⁸ This Recommendation asks Member States to put in place such arrangements by no later than 2018, but implementation is severely lacking. The European Commission is encouraged to follow up on this Recommendation by providing targeted support and guidance to the Member States to help them identify and overcome, in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, the obstacles preventing such arrangements to take shape. This is vital so that the *skills, competences and learning experiences that the above proposals expect EU citizens to obtain can be valorised, no matter what setting they are attained in.*

Upcoming package - mutual recognition of study abroad periods, language learning and early childhood education and care

On 2 May, the European Commission is expected to put forward a new package of measures for achieving the European Education Area and will include proposals for three new Council recommendations on promoting mutual recognition of higher and secondary education qualifications and study periods abroad; on high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems; and improving language learning.

As concerns the proposal on **mutual recognition**, while the Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes this as an important tool for fostering cross-border mobility, it stresses that a clear commitment from Member States will be needed in order to ensure its full implementation, as the difficulties in implementing the Bologna process have shown. We highlight the importance of organising more Peer Learning Activities, with a diverse and well-balanced participation of the various stakeholders (including learners themselves, civil society, teachers and educators, researchers), to assist Member States in their efforts in moving towards mutual recognition. This Recommendation has significant potential to support lifelong learning but to unlock this potential it should have a broad scope, encompassing all sectors of education and recognising the need to support flexible pathways, i.e. mobility between different types (academic/vocational) and levels of education, for all learners as previously highlighted in several EU documents⁹. *Regarding school study periods abroad in particular, these should be recognised on the basis of a competence-based learning agreement between the student, the sending and hosting school, and the pupil exchange organisation (if applicable). The learning agreement should take into account both the competences gained through formal education and the transversal competences developed through non-*

⁷ LLLP Position Paper [“Reimagining Education for the Digital Age”](#)

⁸ [Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)

⁹ [Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning; 2012 Commission Communication on Rethinking Education](#)

*formal and informal learning.*¹⁰ Overall, recognising alternative forms of certification and the validation of competences acquired outside formal settings, again linking to the 2012 Council recommendation, should be a priority when taking this proposal forward.

In view of the upcoming package we would also like to underline the fact that the largest number of people currently affected by the lack of recognition of prior learning is migrant children, be them regular migrants, refugees or third country nationals. Thus, we would welcome a package that tackles the recognition of prior learning from early childhood onwards, making use of the Key Competences Framework.

The Lifelong Learning Platform supports the **proposal on high quality ECEC**, viewing it as a critical foundation for lifelong learning and essential in itself for ensuring a child's well-being and overall development. As is already well-documented, early childhood education is crucial for influencing an individual's life prospects - in other words, the earlier, the better.¹¹ Hence, we again insist on ***the fundamental value of 'learning to learn' and the fact that ECEC is of strategic importance in fostering this competence***. When an individual learns from an early age the best way to learn for him or herself, they are better equipped to acquire new skills and adapt to change throughout life. In this respect, the proposed Recommendation should be closely linked to the implementation of the revised Key Competences framework (e.g. personal, social and learning competence). Likewise, to help build this critical foundation from a lifelong learning perspective we encourage the Member States to ***recognise the value of and invest in non-formal and informal learning in early childhood***, acknowledging that such provisions including learning in the family sphere are at least as desirable and beneficial as formal ECEC. Family provisions in particular, in line with the best interests of the child and WHO recommendations, should be the focus in the first life year.

To ensure high quality and inclusive ECEC, the Recommendation should place an emphasis on the integration of services (social, health, education), both in the planning and delivery stage. This is important for ECEC because it breaks down silos and promotes a holistic, and thus more effective, approach to meeting the child's diverse needs and promoting his or her well-being at all levels - physical, social, mental and emotional. This has a direct effect on learning because a ***happy and healthy child, whose needs are met in a comprehensive manner, is better equipped to learn, whether it be in formal education or in non-formal and informal learning contexts***. Also at the strategic level, while ECEC remains the responsibility of a different Ministry depending on the country, it is advisable that Member States appoint a 'lead' Ministry or an inter-ministry coordination body responsible for overseeing all ECEC-related policy, thus contributing to a more integrated approach where experts and policymakers from the different strands communicate with and learn from each other.

In terms of the proposal on **language learning**, we welcome the proposed benchmark for all school students finishing upper secondary education to have a good knowledge of two language in addition to their mother tongue. However, we should bear in mind that the latter may not always be the majority

¹⁰ EFIL, EEE-YFU Statement on [Recognition of school study periods abroad - towards a European Educational Area](#)

¹¹ [European Political Strategy Centre: 10 Trends Transforming Education as We Know It](#)

language in the learner's country, so a multilingualism approach recognising the need for mother tongue provisions is essential. Moreover, **language learning opportunities should be made more readily available to learners of all ages and sectors**, with VET and adults in particular requiring targeted support measures. We encourage Member States to adopt a lifelong learning approach when developing their language strategies; after all, learning and updating one's linguistic competences is a truly lifelong exercise in an increasingly mobile society. The proposed Recommendation should also address **access to affordable and quality language learning opportunities**, an area where Member States can be supported with peer learning activities. This access is a major concern since language learning provisions at schools are generally poor and compromised by private demand in some Member States. Obtaining a language proficiency certificate is not affordable for vulnerable groups. However, school alone cannot answer to the needs of all learners, neither are its methods always the most adequate ones. Therefore, it is important to encourage cooperation with spaces and organisations that facilitate language practice and intercultural exchanges.

Conclusion

The Lifelong Learning Platform supports the renewed attention to education at the EU level, calling on the **European Commission to provide guidance and support to the Member States to help these ambitious proposals come to fruition for the benefit of all learners, with no discrimination by age or citizenship**. This should happen in close cooperation with all interested parties including teachers, professional educators, learners, parents, non-formal and informal education providers, civil society organisations and social partners.

It goes without saying that **realising the vision for a European Education/Lifelong Learning Area will require robust investment**. The need for such investment is all the more pressing given the role of education, training and skills in helping to implement various EU initiatives such as the Paris-Declaration, New Skills Agenda, Digital Single Market, European Citizens' Initiative, European Pillar of Social Rights as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, LLLP asks Member States to commit sufficient resources to make inclusive and high quality education, training and lifelong learning a reality for everyone. This should include an ambitious budget for these priorities in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework through such instruments as the Erasmus+ programme and European Social Fund in order to support more peer learning and exchanges between Member States. This is a much needed step to help Europe's education and training systems, and its citizens, achieve their full potential.

Supported by



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The [Lifelong Learning Platform](#) (LLL-P) is an umbrella organisation that gathers 41 European networks active in the field of education and training, coming from all EU Member States and beyond. Currently these organisations represent more than 50 000 educational institutions covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Established in 2005, LLL-P promotes a vision of lifelong learning based on equity, social cohesion, active citizenship and personal development. The Platform works as a space for knowledge exchange between its member networks and uses their expertise to discuss and feed in EU policy-making, making sure that European citizens have their voice heard. In that sense LLLP contributes to a better understanding and dialogue between the grassroots level and European institutions.