



## LEARNING MATTERS

### KEY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM ON THE FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR GROWTH, JOBS AND SOCIAL COHESION

HELD IN BRUSSELS ON 19 AND 20 JUNE 2007

An event organized by DG-EAC of the European Commission and supported by the *European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE)* and the *Network of Experts in the Social Sciences of Education and Training (NESSE)*

At a time of major changes within Europe and internationally, education and training are at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy and play a crucial role since they not only contribute to current social, political, economic and cultural development but also build the intellectual foundations, knowledge, skills and resources to deal with **future challenges**, foreseen as well as unexpected.

In this context, the European Commission, supported by the [EENEE](#) and [NESSE](#) networks of independent experts with which it is currently working, held a symposium in Brussels on 19 and 20 June 2007, bringing together researchers, policymakers from the European and the national level, a large number of stakeholder organisations and several other important players in this field.

This event was a follow-up activity to the Commission's [Communication on the Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems](#) (2006) and to the main concerns expressed by Education Ministers in the [relevant Council Conclusions](#) as well as to the new guidelines from the European Council for the revised Lisbon strategy and the future perspectives of education and training systems. Drawing on state-of-the-art European and international research, the symposium aimed to:

1. highlight the importance of education and training within the broader European policy framework not only for growth and employment but also for cultural development, personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social cohesion;
2. identify some key challenges and opportunities for European education and training systems in the foreseeable future, to consider the policy options and their consequences, and to collect ideas on how to improve the relevance and potential impact of policy initiatives.

#### **The following are some key messages emerging from the Symposium:**

- Education and training are at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy.
- The future of Europe and its regions depends largely on our decisions related to learning.
- Education and training should be better recognised as important building blocks within the broad socio-economic policy context, both at the national and European levels.
- The benefits from education and training are enormous. They are wide-ranging and multilevel, both economic and wider societal, for individuals and for societies.
- Quality education and training are crucial for economic growth, employment and competitiveness, as individual knowledge and skills raise productivity and increase a society's ability to develop and adapt to new technologies.

- Investing in education and training contributes to financial sustainability. Research demonstrates that investing in education and training generates medium- and long-term private, fiscal and social returns that outweigh the initial costs and give a higher rate of return than investments in physical capital and most financial assets.
- Research shows that education and training can and do improve democratic participation, tolerance and respect of diversity, promote social integration, inclusion and community-building, bring better individual and public health, reduced crime, contribute to a cleaner environment, and to a better quality of life.
- At a personal level, education and training improve employment prospects and earnings, but can also turn people into active citizens and give them happier, more fulfilling lives. They enhance self-esteem, which in turn motivates people to learn and achieve more. Quality education helps people solve problems and manage radical change, such as redundancy or divorce. Also, the skills acquired through learning help people understand what further skills they need and how to use the skills of others.
- Education is -and should be- about a lot more than jobs and growth; it is **also** about cultural development, personal fulfilment, active citizenship, inclusion and social cohesion.
- The socio-cultural objectives of learning are often overlooked. There is a need to strike a better balance between the economic and socio-cultural objectives of learning at the European and at the national level.
- The **key challenges** for European E&T systems include the combination of excellence and efficiency with equity, innovation, demographic change and migration. European education and training systems can be reframed to meet both economic and socio-cultural challenges, to combine efficiency with quality and equity. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind and our lifelong learning systems should ensure that there are no dead-ends. The Commission's 2006 Communication on Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems has shown that efficiency and equity objectives are compatible and can be mutually reinforcing.
- With increasing **migration** into and within an already quite culturally differentiated EU, there is an urgent need for more knowledge-sharing on the nature and effectiveness of cultural and social integration processes. Research shows that the education (formal, informal or non-formal) of children, adults and community leaders can play a vital role in this process and that there may be important benefits to be gained from sharing knowledge about successes and failures to date.
- Investing in **quality early childhood education and care** is crucial, as it is at this stage that the foundations are laid for subsequent learning and achievements, and also because investing in quality early childhood education and care is shown to be the most effective way of breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Research confirms that early childhood education and care has the highest rates of return of the whole lifelong learning continuum, especially for the most disadvantaged, and that the results of this investment build up over time.
- Investments in education and training **take time** to bear fruit so when deciding on spending priorities, governments should allow for **long-term planning** at local and national levels.
- The most important factors for efficiency and equity in education and training are the quality, experience and motivation of **teachers** and the types of pedagogy they use. We should continue the effort to **improve the quality of teacher training** (both initial and in-service).
- **Parents have a central role in children's education.** Emphasis should be placed on the involvement of parents and families in children's education and on the development of effective links between schools, families and communities.
- All European education systems, to a greater or lesser extent, are marked by widespread educational inequities that reflect, reproduce and compound socio-economic **inequalities**. Early school leavers, the poor, the homeless, the disabled, the low-skilled, older workers, the unemployed, people re-entering the labour market, migrants, refugees and people from ethnic minorities are among the most vulnerable and severely affected by educational inequalities.
- The pivotal but paradoxical role of education and training in relation to these inequalities is that they both contribute to their perpetuation but they are also seen as a vehicle (and sometimes the *only* vehicle) by which inequalities can be ameliorated.

- Member States should be encouraged to attach more attention to inequalities and exclusion. Efforts to fight disadvantage among the vulnerable segments of the student population should continue.
- It is the **quality**, rather than the quantity of education that has the largest impact on educational outcomes, and consequently on growth and productivity rates. Given that we can only go so far in improving participation rates, we now need to concentrate our efforts on improving the quality and effectiveness of our education and training systems so that they realise their full potential, in terms of yielding economic and social benefits for both individuals and society as a whole.
- While education and training are important building blocks, policy initiatives in this field alone are not enough. Education and training policies must be articulated with wider social and economic reforms in other policy fields such as employment, migration, youth, justice and health. **Holistic approaches and cross-sectoral cooperation** will provide more adequate responses to the challenges that Europe faces.
- Policymaking in education and training needs to be firmly based on reliable research evidence.
- The role of the social-science research community is crucial in the quest for better policies and strategies informed by evidence, because getting high-quality advice from the research community enhances our understanding of the challenges and helps us make better decisions on relevant strategies and policies based on a trustworthy knowledge base.
- The research community should be able to contribute to important policy decisions which have a real impact on the lives of European citizens. The ongoing cooperation between the European Commission and the NESSE and EENEE networks of researchers is a tangible proof of the importance the European Commission attaches to the contribution of the research community to policy making in this field.

#### **Follow-up actions:**

- The key conclusions from this symposium were fed to the High-Level Group of officials of education ministries which met in Lisbon on 27 and 28 June 2007.
- In September 2007, the European Commission will present a Staff Working Document on the links between research, policy and practice aiming to provide an overview of the major actions being undertaken at the national and EU levels to strengthen evidence-based policy and practice in education and training. The SWD will identify the main challenges in this field, and will set out an agenda for future collaborative work.
- Later this year, the key conclusions from this Symposium will provide an input for the preparation of the draft 2008 Joint Report on the implementation of the "Education & Training 2010" work programme. This draft Joint Report will include reflections to be taken into account for the agenda for the post-2010 Work Programme, which will be set in the framework of lifelong learning policies that are both efficient and equitable.