

Education, training: Community action programme Socrates, 2nd phase 2000-2004

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In accordance with provisions listed in the EU Decision establishing the Socrates programme 2000-2006, the European Commission has prepared an interim evaluation report on Community action in this field. The aim of the Report is to examine whether the objectives of the programme are being met, to consider ways in which to improve the implementation of the programme's objectives, and to examine the best structures for the next generation of education programmes (2007-2013). The report scrutinises the period from January 2000 to June 2003. The Report notes that since the programme was approved the political debate on education in Europe has made spectacular progress thanks to the Lisbon Agenda and the recognised need to create a knowledge-based economy. Concerning the programme's success, the Report notes that national mid-term evaluations indicate that the programme is well received and deemed relevant by those who rely on it. There is, however, criticism regarding the management of the procedures. The Commission suggests that the rigid measures outlined in the Decision setting up the Socrates programme can hinder the smooth functioning of the programme and call for greater flexibility in future planning. According to the Report, the programme should, in future, be structured in such a way as to show more clearly the hierarchy of objectives and to make it easier, for those involved, to understand the functioning of the programme. This is particularly important for those involved in the education sector to allow them to identify the actions most suited to their needs. In terms of the ratio of financial resources to achievements, the programme is considered very efficient. Even under this heading, however, bureaucratic concerns are raised. The programme is considered a lot less efficient when the procedures used are compared to the nature and scale of most of the activities. Further, staffing costs for the management or monitoring of activities are very high and impossible to reduce at present in terms of both projects and the programme's managed structures. The Commission bemoans the fact that there is as yet no effective electronic management tool in place. In terms of future provisions, the Report proposes that in order to improve the functioning of the programme, procedures should be streamlined. The principle of proportionality, particularly with respect to the Financial Regulation, need to be given adequate consideration. Other areas in need of improvements include: - Encouraging the number of teachers and educators to participate in the mobility scheme by solving linguistic obstacles. - Improving the visibility of the programmes and - Tying the programme more closely to the vocational training sector.