Education, training and new technologies: eLearning initiative and action plan 2001-2004

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This is an Interim Report on e-learning as requested by the Council Resolution of 13 July 2001. The Commission states that progress has been very encouraging since the adoption of the eLearning Initiative in May 2000 shortly after the Lisbon summit, and the development of the corresponding Action Plan in March 2001. The main objective of involving key education stakeholders has been largely achieved. Special mention should be made of the interest shown by industry and by European universities, two sectors for which e-learning development is crucial. The four action lines and the ten key actions identified in the Action Plan have provided the right impetus for change. There is momentum for sustained progress in infrastructures and equipment and a trend towards quality development, paying special attention to pedagogical and social values. Virtual universities and European content and services issues emerge clearly as priority concerns. The second main objective of strengthening dialogue and cooperation between the Commission and the various players has also progressed. Useful tools are flexible working groups, support of key European education and training networks, relevant conferences and professional meetings. The third main objective, providing a framework for increased transparency and coherence of European action in this field, also shows positive development. The volume and richness of the contribution of the different Commission services is remarkable. The e-learning Initiative can be described as a good example of the Lisbon "open co-ordination" approach. The following have been highlighted as key challenges for the future: - greater emphasis is needed on demonstrating the added value of e-learning through tangible benefits such as increased access to learning, more flexibility and independence, improved cost-efficiency etc. Evaluation methodologies need to be developed for these new learning paradigms; - decision-makers need relevant benchmarks and indicators, for policy and investment decisions. Considerable investments are still needed in e-learning infrastructure and services. - Emphasis must now be placed on quality, standards and pedagogy, to ensure that the quality of e-learning products is appropriate; - organisational issues and teacher/tutor training need greater consideration; - research must be strengthened with increased emphasis on sharing experience and best practice; - public /private partnerships need to be explored; - the market for e-learning content needs to be developed; - the use of e-learning needs to be encouraged as a mechanism for addressing the skills gap - a modern workforce needs essential skills for knowledge economy (ICT, eSkills, etc) and e-learning is seen as an effective mechanism for delivering the necessary continuous, just-in-time, on -the job training.