Basic information

2007/2114(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Adult learning: it is never too late to learn **Subject** 4.40.01 European area for education, training and lifelong learning 4.40.15 Vocational education and training	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
CULT Culture and Education	PACK Doris (PPE-DE)	18/12/2006

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
EMPL Employment and Social Affairs (Associated committee)	ANDERSSON Jan (PSE)	05/06/2007
FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality	FLASAROVÁ Věra (GUE/NGL)	20/03/2007

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Education, Youth, Sport and Culture	FIGEĽ Ján

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
23/10/2006	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2006)0614	Summary
06/06/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
06/06/2007	Referral to associated committees announced in Parliament		
19/11/2007	Vote in committee		Summary
11/12/2007	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0502/2007	
15/01/2008	Debate in Parliament		
16/01/2008	Decision by Parliament	T6-0013/2008	Summary

16/01/2008	Results of vote in Parliament		
16/01/2008	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2007/2114(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/49740

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee opinion	FEMM	PE388.456	27/06/2007	
Committee draft report		PE394.005	18/09/2007	
Committee opinion	EMPL	PE390.719	11/10/2007	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE396.522	17/10/2007	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0502/2007	11/12/2007	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0013/2008	16/01/2008	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Non-legislative basic document	COM(2006)0614	23/10/2006	Summary
Document attached to the procedure	COM(2007)0558	27/09/2007	

Adult learning: it is never too late to learn

2007/2114(INI) - 23/10/2006 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to present a Commission communication on adult learning.

CONTENT: education and training are critical factors for achieving the Lisbon's strategy objectives of raising economic growth, competitiveness and social inclusion. The role of adult learning is recognised in Members States' National Reform Programmes. However, implementation generally remains weak. Most education and training systems are still largely focused on the education and training of young people and limited progress has been made in changing systems to mirror the need for learning throughout the lifespan. An additional 4 million adults would need to participate in

lifelong learning in order to achieve the participation rate of the benchmark agreed by Member States in the framework of the “Education and Training 2010” process. Member States can no longer afford to be without an efficient adult learning system, integrated into their lifelong learning strategy, providing participants with increased labour market access, better social integration and preparing them for active ageing for the future.

This Communication highlights the essential contribution of adult learning, through the acquisition of key competences by all, to employability and mobility in a modern labour market and to social inclusion. It draws on lessons learnt from the dialogue with Member States in the framework of “Education and Training 2010” and from experiences gained in the existing EU education and training programmes, in particular the “Grundtvig” action of the Socrates programme. It recalls that the Structural Funds, and in particular the European Social Fund (ESF), have the potential to support the development of infrastructures and strategies. It underlines the importance of certain specific issues: the gender dimension, in particular regarding data collection, differences in access to lifelong learning and in preferred forms of learning. It provides the necessary policy underpinning for the implementation of the future “Grundtvig” programme, which will form part of the overall Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013. Lastly, it proposes a reflection on adult learning involving Member States and relevant stakeholders, leading to the formulation of an action plan in 2007.

Five key messages for adult learning stakeholders are presented:

Lifting the barriers to participation: compared with the benchmark goal of 12.5% participation in adult learning by 2010, the average rate in 2005 was 10.8%. There is remarkable similarity across Member States in the distribution of adult learning, with those with the lowest levels of initial education, older people, people in rural areas, and the disabled being the least likely to participate in all countries. The paper discusses the different barriers to participation by individuals. It states that the challenge for the Member States is two-fold: to increase the overall volume of participation in adult learning, and to address the imbalances in participation in order to achieve a more equitable picture. This requires targeted public investment to reach those who have been least well-served by education and training systems in the past. Increasing participation in adult learning and making it more equitable is crucial. All stakeholders have a role to play, but public authorities must take the lead in removing barriers and promoting demand, with a special focus on the low-skilled. This will include developing high-quality guidance and information systems, based on a more learner-centred approach, as well as targeted financial incentives to individuals and support for the establishment of local partnerships.

Ensuring the quality of adult learning: poor quality provision of adult learning leads to poor quality learning outcomes. The paper highlights the importance of suitable teaching methods, taking account of the specific needs and learning approaches of adults, improving the overall quality of providers, and improving the quality of delivery. Measures to promote effective delivery include availability of learning sites and childcare facilities locally. Member States should invest in improving teaching methods and materials adapted to adult learners and put in place initial and continuing professional development measures to qualify and up-skill people working in adult learning. They should introduce quality assurance mechanisms, and improve delivery.

Recognition and validation of learning outcomes: the learning outcomes should be recognised and valued, regardless of where and how they are achieved. Within the next five years Member States should implement systems for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, based o the Common European Principles on validation and recognition and taking full account of existing experiences. Development of validation and recognition may be linked to the development of National Qualification Frameworks within the overall context of the European Qualification Framework.

Investing in the ageing population and migrants: the changing demographic situation calls not only for raising the average retirement age and but also for “active ageing” policies addressing life both before and after retiring from formal work. In addition, the challenge for adult learning is to support the integration of migrants in society and the economy, and to make the most of the competences and educational experiences acquired prior to migration. This should involve:

- EU support policies and action through relevant programmes for improving the quality of education and training policies in migrants’ home countries, particularly the European Neighbourhood Countries;
- speeding up mechanisms for assessment of capacities and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning of arriving migrants;
- expanding adult learning opportunities in relation to linguistic, social and cultural integration;
- developing appropriate and effective teaching and promoting more inter-cultural learning.

Indicators and benchmarks: in order to monitor the multiplicity of adult learning and to develop evidence-based policies, reliable data are required. The quality and comparability of data on adult learning must continue to improve. In particular, there is a need for better insight into the benefits of adult learning and the barriers to its uptake, and for better data on providers, trainers and training delivery. The work of the European Commission in this area, including Eurostat, should concentrate on making the best use of existing surveys and data, on improving the harmonisation of concepts and definitions, and on expanding coverage, frequency and timeliness of data. Reliable gender disaggregated data is required.

European Union action: the Communication argues that concentrating on quality, efficiency and equity would reap benefits for both society and the economy. Responsibility in this area lies with Member States. The Commission’s role is to support them in their efforts to modernise their systems. The Commission therefore proposes that there should be dialogue with the Member States and relevant stakeholders to explore:

- ways of making the best use of financial mechanisms available at European level (such as the Structural Funds and the Lifelong Learning Programme);

- how to take proper account of adult learning needs in the National Reform Programmes under the Lisbon strategy;

- how best to involve stakeholders to ensure that the messages in the Communication are acted on in the diverse circumstances prevailing in different Member States;

- how to encourage exchanges of good practices through peer learning activities in the framework of the “Education and Training 2010” programme, including on the basis of the results of existing EU programmes;

- best approaches to improve statistical monitoring.

Based on this reflection the Commission proposes to develop an action plan in 2007 to ensure effective follow-up to the messages set out in the paper.

Adult learning: it is never too late to learn

2007/2114(INI) - 16/01/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Doris **PACK** (EPP-ED, DE) on adult learning by 609 votes in favour to 39 against with 16 abstentions. It welcomes the Action Plan for Adult Learning, and calls on Member States to establish a lifelong learning culture focusing on adults, promoting the acquisition of knowledge and making it more attractive and accessible, taking into the consideration the gender dimension.

Parliament also considers on the following points:

-**improve motivation**: MEPs call for measures aimed at improving training and education programmes for adults in order to motivate a greater number of people to take part in these activities. These measures include improving access to courses, especially through new technology (websites or media specialised in the general or professional education of adults);

-**statistics:** comparable statistical data are needed to develop, review and evaluate policies in the field of adult learning so as to provide indications and orientations for the integrated Lifelong Learning Programme. The European Adult Education Survey must be supported as a means of both collecting comparable information on adult education and promoting shared concepts;

-**reconciliation of family life, working life and lifelong learning**: MEPs point out that reconciling family life, working life and lifelong learning calls not only for greater flexibility in managing time and space, but also for social, economic and tax incentives in order to promote access for adults to training and education programmes. The development of Internet access and of digital-inclusion programmes designed to prevent a digital divide should be promoted and new sources of knowledge and ways of learning, such as distance learning programmes and the provision of learning places, should be encouraged and access made possible for all. Parliament also draws attention to the need to broaden the scope of childcare facilities and to encourage employers, who could provide company childcare facilities and scope for parents to return to work, so that such parents have the opportunity to continue with lifelong learning while carrying on working;

-intergenerational solidarity: to improve transmission and exchange of the knowledge, skills and experience of adults between generations, MEPs propose mentoring schemes to support various entrepreneurial and craft activities within the system of knowledge sharing and best practices. They also support the development of volunteering programmes aimed at promoting inter-generation solidarity and recognition of experience and qualifications;

-language learning: MEPs reiterate the importance of providing greater support for language courses, especially those aimed at immigrants, and of encouraging the learning of foreign languages among the population as a whole. They support the idea of establishing "Skills audits" for immigrants, the low-skilled and the disabled, which contribute to reducing racism, xenophobia, discrimination and exclusion;

-improving access to and quality of education: MEPs consider that access to higher education should embrace a wider public, including adults with work experience and older people, for which purpose education systems should be adapted and made more flexible. Appropriate infrastructure measures and provision of personnel resources must be promoted;

-promoting employment perspectives: MEPs underline the importance of adult learning in order to achieve the goal of creating better jobs in Europe as well as improve quality of life and promote individual development, personal fulfilment and active citizenship. They believe that enterprises should forecast new competences and labour market requirements so that the provision of adult education reflects the demand for skills. The content of education must be tailored to vocational and practical requirements. Parliament points out that lifelong learning does not just increase workers" employability, it also increases their adaptability as well as their geographical and vocational mobility, which is important for the functioning of the internal market. MEPs highlight the fact that a low level of qualification, which is the current situation of a third of the European workforce (72 million workers), implies a high risk of unemployment. It is therefore vital to promote equal access for all citizens to lifelong learning programmes and combat the fact that those with the lowest levels of initial education (some women, immigrants, older people, people in rural areas, and the disabled) are the least likely to take part in training programmes. They must be offered different, suitable programmes and methods. Parliament calls for lifelong learning services to be put in place at all levels. It stresses the importance of the European Social Fund (ESF) and other structural funds in order to achieve the goal of lifelong learning and regrets that in some Member States, insufficient priority and funding are being dedicated to increasing access to adult learning opportunities, especially for older and lower-skilled workers.

-**financing:** Parliament calls on investors to focus attention on developing programmes, skills and qualifications that allow women to obtain a grounding in managerial and entrepreneurial skills and to improve their qualifications with a view to advancement to executive positions. It also calls for the practice of financing training by employers for their employees to become widespread and supported by tax concessions. It is essential that financial incentives be offered to allow people free access to training and education and the ensuing benefits. Such financial incentives could take the form of tax incentives, allowances, grants, co-financing, or reductions in taxation or social security costs for employers establishing appropriate working conditions for adult learning.