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COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Mid term review of the Lifelong Learning Programme

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Main findings	2
	A catalyst for structural changes	2
	A success story for individuals and institutions	3
3.	Progress achieved towards the Programme's quantitative targets	4
	Regular increase in mobility	4
	Strong demand for partnerships, projects and networks	4
4.	European added value and impact of the LLP	5
	Support for policy development at EU and national level	5
	Modernisation of Education and Training institutions	5
	A boost for individual competences	6
	A European added value	6
5.	Management efficiency and customer orientation	7
	Integration of previous programmes into the LLP	7
	Implementation and management	7
	Budget absorption and cost-effectiveness	8
6.	Evaluation recommendations	8
7.	Conclusions	9
	ANNEX.....	11
	LLP grants and budget distribution per sub-programmes 2007-2009.....	11

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 15, paragraph 5 of the Decision No. 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning (LLP Decision)¹, this report provides information on the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). It builds on the findings of the LLP interim evaluation², on National Reports on LLP implementation from the 31 participating countries³ and on information gathered by the Commission.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

During its first three years, the Programme has financed, with almost EUR 3 billion, **trans-national education and training** activities promoting the modernisation of education systems in **31 European countries**. It has catered for **900 000 learning mobility periods of European citizens**, of which more than 720 000 by students and almost 180 000 by teachers/trainers/staff. More than **50 000 European organisations** have taken part in various forms of co-operation activities.

A catalyst for structural changes

The LLP acts as a catalyst for structural change through support to policy development, cooperation and mobility. It improves policy-making by providing quality tools, analysis and research as well as fora for exchanging information on best practices through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Erasmus, the higher education part of LLP, paved the way for the Bologna process, for the convergence of higher education study cycles and for the development of a system for the recognition of studies done abroad based on learning outcomes. Leonardo da Vinci (LdV), the vocational education and training (VET) part, supports the implementation of the Copenhagen process, developing the quality and relevance of vocational education and training, increasing the transparency of qualifications and promoting the mobility of VET learners and professionals. LLP also stimulated understanding of the European construction and the education of young professionals in EU matters under Jean Monnet.

The LLP fostered cooperation initiatives in Europe at all levels of education and training, including schools under Comenius and adult education providers under Grundtvig.

The respondents to evaluation surveys emphasised the role of the LLP mainly in policy cooperation and interchange, development of the European dimension in education and training and the extent to which the LLP creates additional value in comparison with similar international or national programmes. The finding is that in the absence of the LLP,

¹ OJ L 327, 15.11.2006, p. 45.

² The interim evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme has been implemented between January and December 2010 by the international consortium led by the Public Policy and Management Institute from Lithuania. The full LLP interim evaluation report can be consulted at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports.

³ National reports provided by countries participating in the LLP (27 EU Member States, EEA countries and Turkey) in agreement with paragraph 15.4 of the LLP Decision and covering the 2007-09 period were important sources of information and data for the overall interim evaluation of the LLP.

developments in these areas would be fragmented (in terms of scope of activities and coverage of the participating countries), activities would be carried out on a smaller scale and less extensively, and a number of important results would not have been achieved at all.

However, not all the potential has been unleashed. An excessive number of objectives set for the Programme has translated in a host of specific actions, some of which lack the critical mass to have a long lasting impact. Progress towards a lifelong learning approach as opposed to one based on educational sectors is still quite limited. Finally, while the largest impact of the LLP actions is found on the individual and institutional level, the impact at systemic – policy level is rather moderate. Its direct added value is predominantly linked to the recognition of qualifications and increased transparency of education and training system across Europe but the direct influence of LLP actions on the modernisation of education and training systems is still hard to observe and estimate.

A success story for individuals and institutions

LLP mobility can be considered as success story. A study on a value of Erasmus Mobility of students and teachers indicated that a temporary period of study in another European country helped to enhance international competences, facilitated access to the labour market and contributed to placing former Erasmus students in visibly international professional positions. Mobility within the LLP also contributed to the development of the European identity and such values as combating racism, prejudice, xenophobia and discrimination.

However, the LLP still faces some difficulties. Problems with reaching individuals and organisations beyond established education circuits, very high levels of unmet demand, still limited involvement of enterprises as venues for mobile student placements or insufficient language knowledge of participants (notably adults) in mobility actions remain important factors which limit the reach of the programme.

An improved management and control framework

80 % of the LLP is delivered through a network of 40 National Agencies which together manage around EUR 900 million per year, while the remaining part of larger-scale cooperation projects and networks is managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The National Agencies effectively used the earmarked funds (over 90 %) in the first 3 years of implementation. Extensive use of lump sum grants and of electronic forms was instrumental both for achieving customer satisfaction and cost efficiency. Financial audits of National Agencies also show sound management practice with very low error rates (<2%).

There are still some areas for improvements: The number of audits or quasi-audits is high and they are not always sufficiently coordinated. Management of the previously independent programmes is not yet fully integrated. Possibilities offered by the electronic management tools are not yet fully explored. The Programme had a difficult start-up phase with a need for successive adjustments at all levels: forms, IT systems, management rules, reporting principles and requirements. It is fair to admit that the positive appreciation of the Programme management today by the main stakeholders reflects more the snapshot of 2010 than the average perception in 2007-2009. There is now a general call for stability by

letting principles and processes to settle, and cost benefits having better exploited for a preparation of the implementation phase.

3. PROGRESS ACHIEVED TOWARDS THE PROGRAMME'S QUANTITATIVE TARGETS

The most recent data show that reasonable progress has been achieved towards quantitative targets. Some 450 000 pupils were involved in Comenius education activities on an annual basis (with the target being at least 3 million over the period of 2007–2013), which would add up to 3 150 000 pupils involved by 2013. Since the Erasmus programme started in 1987, 2.15 million students participated in its mobility actions by 2009 (with a target of 3 million by 2012). LdV supported more than 72 000 placements in enterprises in 2009 and almost 79 000 in 2010, an increase of almost 10 % (the target is at least 80 000 placements in enterprises per year by 2013). Finally Grundtvig supported mobility of around 6 100 staff and adult learners in 2009 (at least 7 000 individuals are to be involved in adult education mobility per year by 2013). However, based on the 2007-2009 data, the evaluators pointed to a risk that some of the LLP quantified targets set by the legal base for the sectoral sub-programmes would not be reached owing to the insufficient size of the Programme budget and other, mainly mobility related, barriers.

Regular increase in mobility

More than 60 % of the total LLP budget supports transnational mobility. The biggest share goes to *higher education under Erasmus* - in the 2008/09 academic year almost 200 000 students went abroad for studies or traineeships, an increase of 15.5 % compared with 2006/07. Traineeships in enterprises have met with increasing success - in the year 2008/09 more than 30 000 Erasmus students went on placements in enterprises, a year-on-year increase of more than 50 %.

The interim evaluation underlined the high relevance of *Leonardo da Vinci* placements for the employability and the entrepreneurial skills of participants. More than 67 000 *vocational education & training* trainees, apprentices, jobseekers, teachers and trainers benefitted from such placements in 2009. The involvement of SMEs was considerable in this respect - 80 % of LdV trainees were placed in a company with less than 250 employees.

Mobility also accelerated in *Grundtvig non-vocational adult education*. In 2009, over 41 % more grants were awarded for staff mobility than in the previous year, thanks to the introduction of the new Visits & Exchanges and Assistantships for adult education staff.

With the aim of improving the quality of primary and secondary education some 10 600 individual mobility grants for teacher training and 1 170 assistantships for future teachers were awarded by *Comenius* in 2009, a 22 and 6.5 % increase on 2007 respectively. A new Comenius mobility action - *Individual Pupil Mobility* - was launched in 2009 with the first 700 pupils studying abroad in 2010.

Strong demand for partnerships, projects and networks

The second biggest share of the LLP budget is aimed at partnerships and cooperation projects and networks. The *eTwinning* provides technical infrastructure and pedagogical support for teachers and schools to network and to set up their own European school cooperation projects. Since 2007 more than 17 500 projects involving around 50 000

schools have been registered. 125 000 teachers are registered in the eTwinning platform. A new **Comenius Regio** Partnerships action, aiming at supporting the involvement of regional and local authorities in school education, was launched in 2008, with 280 grants awarded in 2009. *Leonardo da Vinci* cooperation projects have supported national reform induced by the Copenhagen process. VET stakeholders have tested and mainstreamed European instruments such as EQF, EQAVET and ECVET at national level. In *Grundtvig / adult education* cooperation emphasis was given notably to socially disadvantaged groups and to volunteers under the new Senior Volunteering Projects financed from 2009.

Specific attention was paid by the LLP to the promotion of **language learning** and the **use of ICT** in education and training. This has been reflected in 2007-2009 in support respectively to 85 and 65 large-scale projects and networks. Demand for the different activities offered by the Programme is much higher than funds available. As a result, on average less than half of all applications under the four sectoral programmes were selected for funding in the period 2007-09.

4. EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE AND IMPACT OF THE LLP

The interim evaluation confirmed that the LLP successfully reached staff and learners in formal education and training and met most of their needs with regard to the quality of learning, the acquisition, recognition and validation of skills and competences, personal development, language learning and social skills.

Support for policy development at EU and national level

The evaluation confirmed the strong policy relevance of the LLP, with a clear link to the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework. Policy cooperation under the OMC was boosted through the funding from LLP transversal activities and through support to peer learning. It also played a major role in fostering a European area of lifelong learning by supporting both the development and the implementation of such tools for transparency, transferability and recognition of qualifications as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and Europass. More than 80% of evaluation respondents felt that without the LLP the level and quality of activities aimed at development of tools and methods for the recognition and evaluation of competences and skills would be lower.

In addition, the Jean Monnet part of the LLP effectively fosters the promotion of studies on European integration.

Modernisation of Education and Training institutions

The Programme contributed to opening up and modernising education institutions through the introduction of new teaching methods, exchange of good practices, the review and internationalisation of curricula as well as improvements in institutional management and governance.

The majority of schools participating in Comenius improved their working environment and introduced new teaching and learning methods inspired by partners from abroad. They became more open to international collaboration and enhanced their image and status locally, which attracted parents and retained motivated teachers. LdV contributed to the

adaptation of vocational programmes to labour market needs and to improving EU transparency regarding curricula, qualifications and occupational standards. By participating – often for the first time – in European cooperation through Grundtvig, organisations involved in adult education developed improved teaching methods, more effective strategies for outreach to socially marginalised learners, new ways of validating skills and competences, and improved provision of courses for the training of adult education staff. The participation in Erasmus improved student services and fostered new learning and teaching methods and professionalization of management procedures.

A boost for individual competences

The evaluation revealed that the development of key competences is considered the most positive impact of participation in LLP by its individual beneficiaries. This is followed by improvements in self-confidence, adaptability and capacity for teamwork. Participants improved their sense of initiative and entrepreneurial skills. Mobile Erasmus students acquired different academic knowledge than at home, increased their foreign language and intercultural skills, boosted their professional outlook and sense of being European citizens. Non-mobile students benefited from the courses taught by foreign incoming teachers. Staff participating in exchanges brought home new teaching and working methods and new academic contacts for further cooperation.

As revealed in the replies to the evaluation surveys, the newly gained competences enhanced the employability of almost 70 % of surveyed participants of LLP actions.

A European added value

The surveys of National Authorities and National Agencies revealed the LLP's European added value notably in three areas. First, in the absence of the LLP, policy cooperation and interchange between the participating countries would have been considerably lower and fragmented. Second, the Programme supported the development of a European dimension in education and training through more intensive cooperation between education providers, changing structures and practices of the educational institutions, encouraging the emergence of new national and multi-national mobility programmes and creating a sense of European citizenship among mobile learners, teachers and trainers. Third, the LLP complemented existing similar international, bilateral and national programmes. The evaluation underlined that the vast majority of other existing mobility programmes focus predominantly on higher education and much less on secondary education, VET or especially adult education. The value of the Programme thus clearly lies in the wide range of target groups addressed and the broad geographical coverage of its actions.

By contrast with other larger scale EU interventions, such as the Structural Funds, the LLP's asset lies in its support to transnational cooperation, giving access to a wider range of best practice and innovative ideas than would be possible on a nationally-focused or bilateral basis. Some areas for improvement were, however, identified. Notably, the Programme objectives are too numerous and sometimes too vague and thus difficult to measure. They cover a wide range of areas which often overlap. Besides, the results of LLP projects are still under-exploited. Although information is widely distributed by participating organisations, these results are not often implemented by other organisations or integrated by policy systems. There is thus still a gap between the LLP institutional beneficiaries and key decision makers.

5. MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY AND CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

Integration of previous programmes into the LLP

The integration of three previous programmes⁴ into the LLP has been successful mainly in relation to the overall management thanks to considerable administrative simplification, as well as the dissemination of information to the target groups. However, the evaluation analysis noted several areas of potential thematic overlaps between the sub-programmes, e.g. between Leonardo da Vinci and Comenius partnerships where in some countries there is a lack of clear delineation between vocational education and technical training in secondary schools or between Grundtvig actions, providing second-chance school oriented adult learning, and Leonardo da Vinci (notably in the provision of "indirectly vocational" or "employability relevant" general competences).

In addition, the lifelong learning perspective has not yet been fully exploited. There is still a difficulty to pursue cross-sectoral projects. In that respect, the existence of a "transversal programme" has not sufficiently compensated for the segmentation of the main part of the LLP. The Programme itself is still complex. In 2009 the LLP supported 65 actions⁵, an increase of 9 in comparison to the start of the Programme in 2007.

Implementation and management

More than three quarters of the LLP budget, around 900 million euro per year, representing nearly 40 000 contracts, is managed by a network of National Agencies which are in charge of the smaller scale mobility and partnerships "decentralised" actions at national level. Larger-scale international cooperation "centralised" projects and networks, and actions of the Jean Monnet Programme, are managed by the EACEA.

Overall, the evaluation concluded that the implementation and management structure of all actions was appropriate in the years 2007-2009. National Agencies initially faced difficulties notably with the changes in both reporting and technical requirements applicable to the Programme's management. Over time however, these changes contributed to improvements in their management and especially supervision and control systems.

The improvements in the area of monitoring and control mechanisms were supported by the use of various ICT based management tools, in particular by the two databases - LLPLink for decentralised actions and Saykiss for the centralised ones. Evaluators pointed out however that notably LLPLink, which was deployed in a very short period of time, still has potential for further refinement in order to increase the efficiency of the LLP's management, monitoring and control measures.

Widespread introduction of grants based on fixed amounts (lump sums and flat rate grants based on a scale of unit costs) allowed significant simplification of LLP administrative arrangements. Nevertheless a number of LLP actions, notably centralised ones and various forms of mobility, still comprise a combination of fixed costs and real costs. There may thus be room for further simplification and further decrease of the administrative burden for beneficiaries and LLP management bodies alike.

⁴ Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and eLearning

⁵ 23 in mobility, 5 in partnerships, 11 for multilateral projects, 13 for multilateral networks and accompanying measures and 13 actions for studies, observations and analysis and for the Jean Monnet Programme.

The overall monitoring system of the LLP suffered, according to the evaluation conclusions, from the fact the Programme indicators and monitoring framework was not developed until 2010. In addition, the approved indicators primarily focused on outputs, whereas monitoring of results and potential impacts was less systematic.

Budget absorption and cost-effectiveness

In global terms higher education institutions through Erasmus received in average around 45 % of LLP funds, followed by vocational training in Leonardo da Vinci with 26 % of the funds, school education in Comenius following with 16 % and non-vocational adult learning in Grundtvig with 5 %. The Transversal and Jean Monnet programmes represent around 5 % and 2 % respectively.

Based on the ratio between the operating grant allocated to NAs / the subsidy for EACEA and the total amount of LLP funds managed by the respective agencies, the evaluation analysis estimates that operating grants allocated to these management bodies constituted 5.4 % of LLP overall funds in 2007-2009. Results of evaluation case studies and interviews show that "other policy instruments, such as e.g. OMC, would not provide better cost-effectiveness" in achieving the desired outputs or results.

The evaluation analysis confirmed that the 2007-2009 allocation of funds across the sectoral sub-programmes and actions was in line with the minimum requirements set by the legal base⁶. Some funding re-allocations were, nevertheless, recommended for those sub-programmes which were then showing difficulties in reaching their quantified targets .

6. EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendations by the independent evaluators can be summarised as follows (for the complete list, please consult http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports):

1. The Programme should seek a stronger alignment with the priorities and objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), supported by the definition of impact monitoring indicators;
2. The Programme should do more to involve those who are outside the formal initial education and training sector;
3. The Programme should do more to further integrate and harmonise objectives, actions and implementation tools between all sectors and sub-programmes in order to better support a lifelong learning perspective;
4. The Programme should further invest in mechanisms for the recognition and validation of competences;

⁶ According to article B 11 of the annex to the LLP Decision, the minimum allocations for sectoral sub-programmes were set as follows: Comenius – 13 %, Erasmus – 40 %, LdV – 25 % and Grundtvig – 4 %,

5. In order to increase its efficiency the Programme should look for possible further administrative simplification, in particular by expanding the share of projects financed on fixed costs. In the remaining management system areas it should, however, look for a period of stability until 2013 in order to capitalise on recent improvements.

6. Cooperation between the Executive Agency and the National Agencies should be clarified and reinforced.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Lifelong Learning Programme is considered by the external evaluation as relevant and instrumental to reaching the key Education and Training objectives agreed at EU level and thereby contributing to attaining the overarching strategic objectives of the European Union. It is also important for the lives of the individual citizens involved, user friendly, highly popular and addresses the needs of its various target communities. The control framework is working effectively.

But there is still room for improvements. Some of them are of a managerial nature and are within the reach of the Commission. Most are more far-reaching and would require a review and rethinking of the design of the Programme.

Based on the mid-term review of the LLP, the Commission intends to:

- fix the management framework that has reached a good quality level with stable rules, procedures and IT tools minimising efforts throughout the implementation chain: Commission, National Agencies, final beneficiaries. Potential change will be assessed against a thorough cost-benefit and risk analysis;

- examine as a matter of urgency the possibility to simplify audits by replacing the current approach of untargeted sampling with a new one, based on a serious risk assessment strategy ;

- test new exchange platforms or the extension of existing platforms or other means to facilitate exchanges of information and know-how to match offer and demand for cooperation projects and mobility (e.g. Leonardo or Erasmus placement partner search).

Without prejudging its proposals for the next programme generation in the context of the new MFF, the Commission intends to:

- reflect on a comprehensive policy framework for the new MFF, seeking synergies between different types of EU-financed investments in education and training, to avoid overlaps and maximise impact;

- consider how to further build on the strengths of the existing Programme to contribute to the overarching Europe 2020, E&T 2020 and the Digital Agenda objectives. EU-wide actions engaging all Member States in similar activities with common objectives, transnational learning mobility, providing evidence for policy reform, serving as an incubator for innovative actions and best practices, exchange and networking at low cost, are all areas where the Programme excels;

- reflect how better to balance ambitious targets, notably through meaningful concentration, streamlining, simplification and better impact measurement;
- prepare the management and control framework for the next Programme generation to ensure a seamless start-up phase and full exploitation of all possible simplifications.

ANNEX

LLP grants and budget distribution per sub-programmes 2007-2009

(Source: LLP Interim Evaluation Report; LLP Activity Report 2009-2010 – data updated)

	2007				2008				2009			
	No. of applications received	No. of grants awarded	Budget (in EUR)	% of total operational budget	No. of applications received	No. of grants awarded	Budget (in EUR)	% of total operational budget	No. of applications received	No. of grants awarded	Budget (in EUR)	% of total operational budget
COMENIUS	37 498	18 142	147 000 000	16.1	35 954	19 892	152 000 000	15.3	40 233	20 007	181 000 000	17.2
ERASMUS	n/a	215 353	407 000 000	44.6	n/a	235 757	456 000 000	46.0	n/a	252 102	459 000 000	43.6
LEONARDO DA VINCI	8 298	3 842	236 000 000	25.8	11 030	5 655	257 000 000	26.0	12 984	6 125	274 000 000	26.0
GRUNDTVIG	7 099	3 292	44 700 000	4.9	7 999	3 678	45 600 000	4.6	11 088	5 099	60 800 000	5.8
TRANSVERSAL PROGRAMME				5.6				5.5				5
KA1 - Policy	43	17	26 700 000		35	24	24 500 000		45	6	26 900 000	
KA2 - Languages	97	26	11 000 000		88	30	18 400 000		75	29	12 700 000	
KA3 - ICT	146	23	10 200 000		144	22	8 660 000		211	26	9 000 000	
KA4 - Dissemination	54	12	2 970 000		49	12	2 920 000		65	12	4 600 000	
JEAN MONNET PROGRAMME				2.6				2.4				2.3
KA1	326	145	4 690 000		284	115	4 420 000		465	115	4 920 000	
KA2	97	26	17 100 000		88	30	17 500 000		75	29	17 900 000	
KA3	23	18	1 700 000		26	18	1 670 000		32	20	1 700 000	
OTHERS			3 430 000	0.4			1 520 000	0.2			900 000	0.1
TOTALS	n/a	240 896	912 490 000	100	n/a	265 233	990 190 000	100	n/a	283 570	1 053 420 000	100
Administrative expenditure			11 300 000				11 900 000				11 300 000	
Executive Agency			15 300 000				17 100 000				18 100 000	
TOTAL LLP BUDGET			939 090 000				1 019 190 000				1 082 820 000	

Comenius: includes Assistantships; In-service training; multilateral and bilateral School Partnerships; Regio partnerships; Multilateral projects; Multilateral networks, Accompanying measures and Preparatory visits.

Erasmus: includes Student mobility, Staff mobility, Intensive programmes, Language courses and Preparatory visits.

Leonardo da Vinci: includes Mobility projects for persons in initial vocational training, people on the labour market and VET professionals; Partnerships; Multilateral projects (Transfer of Innovation and Development of Innovation); Multilateral networks, Accompanying measures and Preparatory visits.

Grundtvig: includes Visits/exchanges for adult education staff; Assistantships; In-service training for adult education staff; Workshops; Senior volunteering projects; Learning partnerships; Multilateral projects; Multilateral networks, Accompanying measures and Preparatory visits.

Transversal Programme - Key activity 1/Policy: application and grant data do not include Study Visits action.