

Ján Figel'—Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Multilingualism

Learning for competitiveness

Launch of the CLEPA White Paper

Brussels, 22 September 2005

Check against delivery

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction



Learning for competitiveness

Ján Figel'

European Commissioner
for Education, Training, Culture, and Multilingualism

Launch of the CLEPA White Paper on Education

Brussels, 22 September 2005

First of all, I would like to thank you for your kind invitation to this launch of your White Paper on Education and Training.

I congratulate Clepa for this important initiative. I was especially impressed by the breadth and vision of your document. Impressed but not surprised, given Europe's traditional contribution to the car industry and the globalised nature of your sector.

The dialogue between industry and education can too often be a dialogue of the deaf. Not so this time. I am encouraged to see how much overlap there is between your White Paper and the Commission's policies on education and training.

The common ground covers above all basic educational values. It is clear that there is no trade-off between personal development and the skills required by the labour market.

Vocational training is the most obvious area of overlap between the worlds of education and industry, but your White Paper does not focus only on this area, and for very good reasons.

Technologies are evolving fast, and industry has understood that it needs above all flexible individuals, not workers that can fill neatly defined positions.

The European Round Table of Industrialists has often stressed this fact. They illustrate the principle of lifelong learning with the image of the “education chain”. As you know, lifelong learning lies at the heart of the Commission’s policies on education and training.

However, these metaphors are not important; what counts is the substance. To master today’s technologies, we need knowledge and skills; to master the technologies of tomorrow, we need **the ability to learn**.

Key competences framework

Your White Paper emphasises “soft” as well as “hard” skills, and highlights the need for a balanced, well-rounded skill set.

The Commission will soon propose a “key competences framework” that defines the key skills that everyone should learn during initial education, and that everyone should maintain and up-date in the course of his or her life.

(Slide 2: Key competences)



- These key competences include the basic skills (reading literacy, numeracy, languages and ICT);
- They also include abilities such as learning to learn, social and cultural skills and entrepreneurship.

Let me illustrate what we mean by ‘entrepreneurship’. This is a broad ability that every individual—including employees—needs to contribute to the success of companies. It involves team skills, problem-solving, creativity and communication skills.

This key competences framework is to be used as a reference tool by Member States. It has been prepared on the basis of extensive work involving the Commission Member States and experts. It is therefore not something the Commission is imposing from top down.

Lisbon agenda/benchmarks

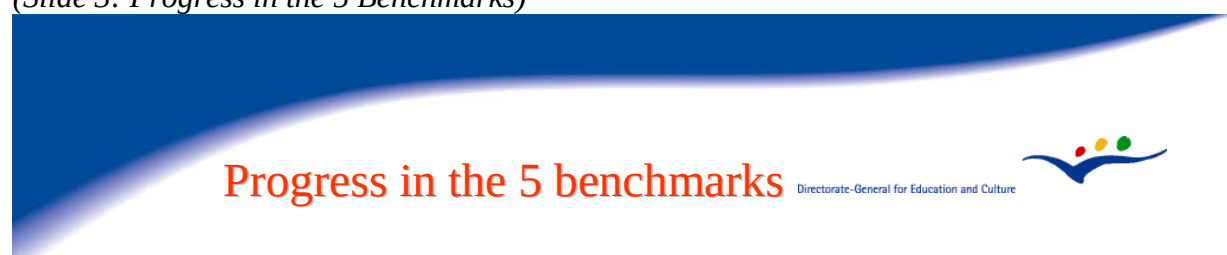
This is one of the challenges our education and training systems must meet. What can the European Commission do to help meet these challenges?

Education remains primarily a national or regional responsibility, so our role is rather limited. However, the need to build the knowledge-based society has created a favourable climate for concerted action.

The work programme called “Education and Training 2010” is our contribution to achieving this goal. It is based on an innovative method whereby Member States maintain their autonomy but agree to work towards shared objectives.

In education and training, Member States have agreed on five quantified objectives or “benchmarks”.

(Slide 3: Progress in the 5 Benchmarks)



Benchmark	2000	Today (2004)	Trend 2010	Bench-mark 2010	Likelihood of achieving the benchmark
Early school leavers, (%)*	17.3	15.7	13-14	10	Low
MST graduates	650 000	745 000 (03)	1 000 000 (+45%)	750 000 (+15%)	High
Youth education attainment (up.sec %)	76.4	76.7	77	85	Low
Low achieving 15 year olds, reading, %	19.4	19.8	20	-20% (15.5)	Low
Participation in LLL, % of adults*	7.9	9.9	11	12.5	Medium-low

* Change in series (especially in 2003 for LLL)

The benchmarks concern:

- Reducing to 10% the proportion of early school leavers;
- Increasing the proportion of graduates in mathematics, science or technology; and improving the gender balance, an issue which your White Paper also raises;
- Raising upper-secondary education attainment levels;
- Reducing the share of 15-year-olds who underperform in literacy standards and finally;
- Raising adult participation in lifelong learning.

As you can see, with the exception of maths, science and technology graduates, progress in most areas has been rather disappointing. The unavoidable conclusion is that we all need to try harder. In November this year, I will propose to the College a progress report on the Education and Training 2010 programme, which will sum up progress so far and suggest ways in which to improve it.

The Copenhagen process

As regards vocational education and training (VET), the past few years have been marked by good cooperation between national authorities and social partners and the European Commission. The common goal is reforming and modernising Europe's VET systems.

This reform movement is known as 'the Copenhagen process', after a declaration adopted in that city in 2002. The Copenhagen declaration points to the need to increase support for education, training and learning initiatives at sectoral level.

Let me stress one point. Public authorities at national and European level can do a lot for education and training through policy-making, coordination, and funding. However, much is expected of the business community too. Your contribution is crucial if we are serious about winning the knowledge challenge with our global competitors.

Thanks to the Copenhagen process a number of tangible results have been reached, such as the development of a "Common quality assurance framework" for VET and "Common European principles for validating non-formal and informal learning".

We also have "Europass" which provides a framework for the transparency of qualifications and skills and is directly accessible to any European citizen who wants to use it.

In December last year, the European Ministers responsible for VET met in Maastricht with the Social Partners and the European Commission. The Communiqué they adopted took stock of the work done so far, and for the first time they set new joint priorities and guidelines for the future.

In the wake of this political impetus we are developing new tools for Vocational Education and Training. ECVET is one of them.

ECVET is the European Credit Transfer System for VET. It is a system which—like the existing ECTS for higher education—will allow learners in VET to trace their own training path across different European systems.

ECVET is based on skills and learning outcomes defined at national or sectoral levels. Its practical implementation will include the development of voluntary agreements between VET providers throughout Europe. We are in the process of consulting with experts on what is a complex technical issue. On that basis, the Commission will come forward with a proposal in 2007.

Another issue raised by your paper is that learning takes place in many different contexts: it may take place in learning institutions or at the workplace; it may range from official courses to informal on-the-job training.

This paints a complex picture, especially because informal settings are less visible and less valued than formal ones. To tackle this issue, the Commission supports the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

We can take forward this work in close co-operation with industry, and we welcome a continuing dialogue with CLEPA on how to do this.

Let me tell you about the initiatives that are being launched to bring down the barriers to mobility in VET.

As you know, this is one of the key obstacles to a functioning European labour market and here I want to mention the work done through the Leonardo Da Vinci programme.

Since 1995, this programme has promoted cross-border cooperation between VET systems through innovation and pilot projects. Leonardo also funds mobility for young trainees and study visits for policy-makers and practitioners.

Leonardo has co-financed quite a few projects in the automotive industry on a variety of topics including bodywork repairing, aerodynamics, body engineering, fluid mechanics, and total quality management.

Funding under Leonardo is modest, particularly when compared with the European Social Fund. However, let us not forget that Leonardo is a transnational cooperation programme. For this reason, it can help develop innovative outward-looking tools and solutions.

Work and training abroad is important for personal development and Europe's competitiveness. Under the proposed successor programme for 2007–2013, the Commission aims to increase trainee placements threefold to 150,000 per year. Whether we can achieve this depends on the willingness of Member States to give us the necessary financial resources.

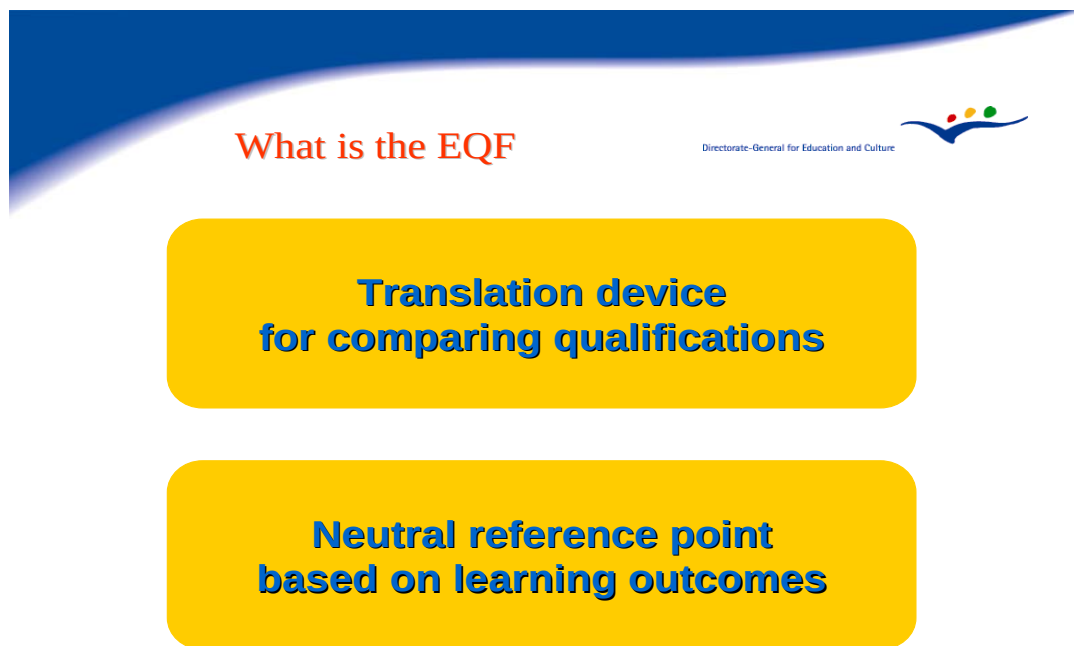
I cannot over-emphasise how spending money to improve Europe's human capital is the best investment in our future. Each Euro spent on education, training, and culture brings high returns in economic and political terms.

The European Qualifications Framework

Finally, I would like to tell you about our European Qualifications Framework proposal. A Europe-wide consultation was launched last July.

This is the most important, recent initiative to strengthen co-operation in education, training and learning across Europe and reduce obstacles to mobility in the European labour market.

(Slide 4: What is the EQF)



National Qualification Authorities and industry are invited to use the new framework as a reference for their systems. This will facilitate comparisons, enable transfer and support recognition of qualifications developed in different countries, sectors, and systems.

The core feature of the EQF is a set of eight common reference levels based on learning outcomes. The shift towards learning outcomes is important: it stimulates combinations and accumulation of qualifications acquired in different institutions and contexts, which is a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

In a word: for the EQF what matters is the result and the quality of learning; where and how the learning took place is less important.

(Slide 5: EQF and sectoral stakeholders)



- Invite sectors to link sectoral qualifications to EQF
- Facilitate sector internal competence developments
- Facilitate link between national and sectoral qualifications
- Decentralisation, self-certification and transparency

The EQF recognises that meeting future challenges in education and training depends on the support of the business community.

Concretely, the EQF could provide a common European reference to guide, inform and inspire developments at sector level. A widespread application of the EQF could have a number of benefits;

- It would be easier to link qualifications developed at sectoral and national level;
- It would be easier to improve links between initiatives in different sectors;
- It would increase overall transparency of education and training. This would prevent overlap and help make better use of resources.

We therefore encourage you to contribute to the consultation and see whether and how this can support developments within the automotive sector.

To conclude, the link between economic development and knowledge has never been tighter and clearer. A closer dialogue with our industries on the future of education and training is important.

We should all rise to the challenge in a genuine European effort. Because it is not only about our competitiveness; it is about creating opportunities; about building a future of prosperity and social cohesion for all.

Thank you.