

Lifelong Learning

A. Lisbon and Copenhagen.

The Lisbon European Council and the Copenhagen Declaration: education and vocational training at the centre of the Community interest.

At its Lisbon meeting in March 2000, the European Council invited the Education Council "to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity, with a view to contributing to the Luxembourg and Cardiff processes and presenting a broader report to the European Council in the Spring of 2001".

The Heads of State and Government acknowledged that "the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy" and set the Union a major strategic goal for 2010: "*to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*".

It stressed that this would require not only "a radical transformation of the European economy", but also a "challenging programme for the modernisation of social welfare and education systems". Never before had the European Council acknowledged to this extent the role played by education, training and research systems in the economic and social strategy and the future of the Union.

The Copenhagen Declaration: Following the mandate of the Barcelona European Council, the European Council adopted in November 2002 a resolution on the "promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training" (VET).

This resolution invited the Member States and the Commission to take the appropriate steps necessary to implement the priorities developed under the Bruges initiative, building on and adapting relevant structures and instruments, and involving the social partners, the EEA-EFTA countries and the candidate countries. Following the Copenhagen declaration, the "Bruges initiative" became the Copenhagen process.

The Copenhagen Process has contributed to increasing the culture of voluntary cooperation in vocational education and training based on common objectives in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications.

For the first time are taken into account all levels of education and training, initial and continuing education and training in a lifelong learning perspective.

B. The Lisbon Strategy.

The Lisbon Strategy and the beginning of a new approach.

The Lisbon Strategy and the "Education and Training 2010": The goals set in Lisbon were very ambitious and exhorted Member States to implement a series of structural reforms in the employment, social cohesion, innovation and economic reforms areas.

In order to achieve these goals, the Heads of State and Government were required to implement programmes of welfare state modernisation and transformation of education and training system in Europe through the so-

called Lisbon Strategy, aimed at adopting three strategic goals to be attained by 2010: education and training systems should be organised around quality, access and openness to the world.

In order to ensure the achievement of these objectives, in 2001 the Ministers of Education of the Member States adopted a report “on the future objectives of education and training” and a work programme based on Lisbon objectives, the “**Education and Training 2010 Work Programme**”:

- improving the quality and effectiveness of education and the measurement of progress through agreed instruments.
- facilitating the access of all to education and training systems.
- opening-up education and training systems to the wider world.

In order to guide progress on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, the Council adopted 5 benchmarks to be achieved by 2010:

- the share of low achieving 15 year olds in reading should decrease by at least 20%;
- the average rate of early school leavers should be no more than 10%;
- 85% of 22 year olds should complete upper secondary education;
- the total number of graduates in maths, science and technology should increase by at least 15%, while the gender imbalance in these subjects should be reduced;
- the average participation of working adults population in lifelong learning should reach at least 12.5%.

The Lifelong Learning and the beginning of a new approach: the Lisbon strategy is considered the key point in the development of policies for education and training in Europe, since it’s a strategy designed to ensure structured forms of continuing education (literally “that lasts throughout life”). Fostering lifelong learning means investing in the person, promoting the acquisition of basic knowledge and providing to all the same opportunities for gaining access to a high quality teaching.

Lifelong learning, in particular, appears to be the main element of the Lisbon strategy, not only for the competitiveness and development of employment policies in Europe, but also to achieve social inclusion, active citizenship and human development of individual. Promoting lifelong learning means:

- To bridge the gap between different levels of vocational education and training and among all stakeholders;
- To develop mechanisms and European frameworks capable to improve quality, comparability, transferability and recognition of skills and qualifications of European citizens, regardless of how (formal, non-formal and informal learning), the system (education or vocational training) or the country where they were acquired;
- To invest in the mobility of individuals, increasing the accessibility and openness to the world of VET systems in Europe, particularly through the development of open and dynamic learning environments.

Since 2000, all the measures and strategies to be adopted at European level in the field of vocational education and training will be developed in a lifelong learning perspective, and will refer to the objectives and tools developed in Lisbon.

C. Tools and key concepts.

New tools and frameworks.

The Lisbon Strategy has the undoubted merit of having placed the Education Training at the center of the Community. In particular:

- For the first time an integrated approach to education and vocational training policies is discussed, aimed at ensuring structured forms of continuing education. The concept of lifelong learning begins with the Lisbon strategy and the Copenhagen declaration.

- Since 2000, the Commission has organised a series of special programmes dedicated to achieving the goals set in Lisbon. The EU Lifelong Learning Programme is promoted by the European Commission precisely in order to achieve these goals paving the way for a new generation of European programmes.
- Since 2000, there is the increase of financial resources destined to education and vocational training policies (EC budget 2005):
If the 2005 budget of the European Commission is examined, paying particular attention to items of expenditure for education and culture, it is learned that the European Commission has allocated funds amounting to more than a billion euro, compared to nearly €827 million made available in 2003. More than €414 million of the €1,047,491,166 allocated, have been destined to education (compared to €289,303,726.77 of 2003) and almost €242 million to vocational training (in 2003 these funds amounted to just over €203 million), reflecting the greater commitment of the European institutions in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and the Summit of Bologna, Bruges and Copenhagen. As evidence of the enormous importance assumed by the new Community education programmes, it is important to say that of €242 million euro allocated in 2005 for vocational training, €205.366.880 have been destined to the Leonardo da Vinci Programme. The trend is confirmed in recent years, if it is considered that the European Commission has allocated 6.97 billion euro for the period 2007-2013, exclusively for the adoption of the Lifelong Learning Programme.
- Since the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the European institutions together with Member States identified and developed tools such as common reference levels and EU reference frameworks capable of promoting in the European area the free movement of citizens, of their qualifications and curriculum in order to make Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”, shifting the Community interest towards learning outcomes, quality of education and training system and vocational training:

Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: The Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 identify eight key competences for lifelong learning. The Recommendation exhorts the Member States to develop, as part of education policies, strategies to ensure all key competences of lifelong learning with the aim of:

1. identify and define the key competences necessary for personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society;
2. support Member States' work in ensuring that by the end of initial education and training young people have developed the key competences to a level that equips them for adult life and which forms a basis for further learning and working life, and that adults are able to develop and update their key competences throughout their lives;
3. provide a European level reference tool for policy makers, education providers, employers, and learners themselves to facilitate national and European level efforts towards commonly agreed objectives;
4. provide a framework for further action at Community level both within the Education and Training 2010 work programme and within the Community Education and Training Programmes.

The Reference Framework sets out eight key competences:

- Communication in the mother tongue;
- Communication in foreign languages;
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning to learn;
- Social and civic competences;
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
- Cultural awareness and expression.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a tool that helps communication and comparison between qualifications systems in Europe. Its eight common European reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competences. This allows any national qualifications systems, national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and qualifications in Europe to relate to the EQF levels. Learners, graduates, providers and employers can use these levels to understand and compare qualifications awarded in different countries and by different education and training systems.

The EQF, which is one of the concrete results of the work program "Education and Training 2010", is divided into eight reference levels describing the skills and knowledge of the learner (learning outcomes), regardless of the system in which the qualification was obtained. The eight levels cover the entire range of qualifications, from those obtained at the end of education and basic training to those obtained at the highest levels of education and academic and professional training (level 8). The EQF also improves the transparency and accessibility of European education and training systems: education switches from a traditional approach focused on learning inputs to a learning outcomes approach. On 23 April 2008 the European Parliament and the Council have formally ratified the recommendation. Member States may now adopt, on a voluntary basis, this system aimed at promoting lifelong learning and mobility. By 2010, EU member states will have to make a correlation of qualifications systems of various countries with the EQF. And, starting from 2012, all new qualifications should bear a reference to the EQF in order to identify the knowledge, skills and competences of learners.

Europass. On the occasion of the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000, the European Institutions, together with the Member States, established instruments to promote the free circulation of citizens, their qualifications and CVs within the European area, in order to make Europe "*the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world*".

One of these instruments is EUROPASS (Decision no.2241/2004/EC [1]), a set of documents brought together in a dossier and designed with the aim of making qualifications and competences acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts more transparent and comprehensible.

The documents currently making up the Europass package are:

- The Europass CV and the Europass Language Passport, used to describe personal experiences and competences. These documents are filled in by the holder;
- The Diploma Supplement and the Certificate Supplement serve to translate the contents and value of qualifications transparently, and are issued by the same institutions that issued the original certificates (schools, universities and training agencies);
- The Europass-mobility is used to detail study experiences abroad and is issued by the National Europass Centre Italy.

Europass is used in all 32 countries participating in the Copenhagen process. Its success is demonstrated by its steadily increasing use.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a system for recognizing credit [2] for learning and facilitating the movement of the recognised credits between institutions [3] and across national borders.

ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

ECTS was introduced in 1989 as part of the Erasmus framework and is the only credit system used across Europe. Initially, it was just a credit transfer system. In recent years, ECTS developed into a credit

accumulation system to be implemented at institutional, regional, national and European level as part of the Bologna Process.

ECVET is a system for the accumulation and transfer of units of learning outcomes in vocational education and training in Europe. It allows attestation and recording of learning outcomes acquired in various contexts, both in other countries and through formal, informal or non-formal learning. The diversity of national systems that define the levels and content of qualifications is not conducive to transnational mobility of learners. ECVET would allow this situation to be remedied by facilitating mobility among learners throughout Europe. Member States are free to adopt this recommendation and implement the system. Developed by Member States in cooperation with the European Commission, ECVET has been adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in 2009.

Compatibility and complementarity with other instruments:

- ECVET and EQF: share the same approach based on learning outcomes; the different EQF levels will constitute a point of reference for the ECVET framework;
- ECVET and Europass: Europass documents (Europass certificate supplement and Europass mobility) will complete the ECVET framework describing in detail the qualifications and the credits earned by each learner;
- ECVET and ECTS will be complementary: they have the same function but ECTS is referred to higher education;
- ECVET and Recognition of prior learning (formal and non-formal): by attributing points and credits, ECVET will facilitate the process of recognition of formal or non-formal education to obtain qualifications.

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET is a system approved by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009. It is a new reference instrument to help authorities of Member States promote and monitor the improvement of their systems of vocational education and training (VET). As a reference instrument, the framework makes methodological suggestions that will help Member States to assess clearly and consistently whether the measures necessary for improving the quality of their VET systems have been implemented and whether they need to be reviewed.

The methodology proposed by the framework is based on:

- a cycle consisting of four phases (planning, implementation, assessment and review) described for VET providers/systems;
- quality criteria and indicative descriptors for each phase of the cycle;
- common indicators for assessing targets, methods, procedures and training results.

URL di origine: <https://cnos-fap.it/node/33461>

Links

[1] http://europass.isfol.it/docs/doc_eng/Europass_eng/Decisione%20Europass%20dic04_ENG.pdf

[2] <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/index.htm#credit>

[3] <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/index.htm#institution>