EAEA Statement on the proposal on key competences for lifelong learning

Spring 2006

We consider the paper on key competences represents an ambitious and long-term aim necessary to achieve the Lisbon goals and more. The report is therefore highly welcome since it brings together the essentials of competences for a good life in this society.

We have to bear in mind, however, that the level of achievement differs from one country to another and there remains much in general terms. The principle of subsidiarity does not allow more than recommendations; the implementation is left to the member states.

In addition to the recommendations we would welcome some ideas how to accomplish these tasks; this is a question of persons - who should be involved; of time - when and until when; of place - where on local, regional or national level; of involvement of citizens and related questions. We would also welcome a recommendation that links national implementation efforts to European developments.

Comments to some of the items:

1. Communication in the mother tongue

The footnote: "It is recognised that the mother tongue may not in all cases be an official language of the Member State, and that ability to communicate in an official language is a

pre-condition for ensuring full participation of the individual in society. Measures to address such cases are a matter for individual Member States according to their specific needs and circumstances" leaves room for interpretation on national level and may serve as argument for immigration strict rules.

Migrants communicate most often in their mother tongue, if this is accepted or not. Migrants of the second or third generation are usually brought up in their migrant mother tongue and have to get adapted to a second environment. Often they speak the migrant mother tongue, but can´t write it. The second language is laid upon one that is not really fixed. This may cause confusion in the future and does so as many experiences show.

It is important to give migrants, in particular children and young people, the chance to learn their mother tongue parallel to learning the language of the host/new country.

There are increasing tendencies in all European countries to make the performance of a certain level of the official language compulsory; we cannot, however, prevent migrants that are already living here to speak their languages. We should try to avoid parallel societies, which already exist, but should not grow bigger; language is a crucial element for identity and denying their language means derogating their identity.

Providing a stable background to second and third (and more) generation by good oral and written command of their mother tongue will help developing knowledge and skills in the official language and later in foreign language learning.

This affects school subjects: either specific courses in migrants´ mother tongue(s) or (or in addition) some subjects in their mother tongue; accordingly specific trained teachers and possibly teachers with a migration background.

It means also offering opportunities for adult migrants to develop knowledge and skills in their mother tongue.

2. Communication in the foreign languages

Europe needs, of course, more people that speak more than one language. But only recommending foreign language learning as such without defining a need for it is insufficient. Many people need only basic foreign language command to get along in their holidays; often they even don´t have to speak another language since the individuals they meet - hotel staff and similar - are fluent enough in their language, or a 'lingua franca´ at a basic level will do.

We would welcome some reason why foreign languages should be learned. Foreign languages for example help broaden people´s views of society and shape their attitudes in a new way; they help communicating with people from other backgrounds and cultures; they may support democratic approaches in communication; they increase opportunities to participate in economic life of the common European space etc.

"A positive **attitude** involves the appreciation of cultural differences and diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication." This affects largely teacher and trainer training in formal and non-formal systems. The acquisition of key competences here is therefore closely linked to appropriate teaching or facilitating learning and teachers/trainers/facilitators that are adequately trained.

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

The level of competences seems very high, in particular "B. Scientific competence refers to the ability and willingness to use the body of knowledge and methodology employed to explain the natural world, in order to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions." But again, we consider this as an ambition.

4. Digital competence

"Digital competence requires a sound understanding and **knowledge** of the nature, role and opportunities of IST in everyday contexts: in personal and social life as well as at work." This is a rather unrealistic goal if we consider the extremely fast development of ICT today. It is difficult even for experts to keep track with, and understand opportunities of IST. We would be satisfied if key competences in this issue were reduced to a more realistic level.

We have also to bear in mind that there is still a digital divide: there are whole regions and groups of the population where it is difficult to find computers or difficult to go online.

5. Learning to learn

"Learning to learn **skills** require firstly the acquisition of the fundamental basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and ICT that are necessary for further learning." We don´t think that learning to learn skills can only be developed after acquiring basic skills; they should go parallel. Learning to read and to write in a motivating way, in particular for adults, needs appropriate structures so that they can manage their own learning process. Managing the learning process presupposes also to know, or to develop insight into, one´s learning habits - maybe in the beginning only via trial-and-error. This is the first step to 'learning-to-learn´.

"Individuals should be able to dedicate time to learning autonomously and with self-discipline, but also to work collaboratively as part of the learning process, draw the benefits from a heterogeneous group, and to share what they have learnt. They should be able to evaluate their own work, and to seek advice, information and support when appropriate."

We cast doubts on the realism of this statement - this is an extremely high requirement, which is often not met even by well-educated persons.

We would also welcome some statement concerning help and support for 'learning to learn´.

Teachers and trainers, working with adults in any subject, should know the principles of how to help their learners to learn. This should be one of the key competences of teacher for adults.

6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence

„For successful interpersonal and social participation it is essential to understand the codes of conduct and manners generally accepted in different societies and environments (e.g. at work), and to be aware of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, gender equality, society and culture. Understanding the multi-cultural and socio-economic dimensions of European societies and how national cultural identity interacts with the European identity is essential"

We consider this an extremely high level of key competences. If European citizens reach this level, there will certainly not be any problems in referendums or similar.

Concluding remarks:

When the EAEA prepared the thematic conference in 2004 on basic skills, we recommended the following actions:

- Organisations on national, regional and local level that have not been engaged in Basic Skills /Key Competences and whose national governments have not encouraged the development of KC learning practice should be encouraged and assisted.
- The development of Basic Skills /Key Competences activities should be integrated into basic activities of adult learning providers.
- Various types of advocacy activities should be launched in order to present results and good practice of more advanced members for national governments and experts. Public adult learning forums should be used to initiate a coherent national Basic Skills /Key Competences development programme within adult learning.

As said in the introduction, the principle of subsidiarity does not allow more than recommendations; the implementation is left to the member states. It seems, however, that subsidiarity often serves as an excuse not to take real action. This could be interpreted when reading that "the document has no financial consequences". We would recommend at least to revise priorities and to shift some budget items.

Looking back at what has been done up to now, there were many statements made twice or several times; studies were done repeatedly, but the concrete practical efforts of implementation of Basic Skills /Key Competences leave much to be desired.