



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

EAEA Recommendations for a follow-up of the Action Plan for Adult Learning

April 2011

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA aisbl)
Rue d'Arlon 40, B - 1000 Brussels

Introduction¹

The publication of the Communication (2006) and the follow-on Action Plan (2007) on adult learning foregrounded the issue of adult learning at European level. The two publications sought to shine a spotlight on adult learning in the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, to stimulate the Commission to give leadership and carry out and/or fund a range of activities in relation to adult learning.

The Action Plan aims to implement the key messages of the 2006 Communication on adult learning. It is never too late to learn and defines five concrete priority actions which Member States should seek to implement in order to increase participation in adult learning and develop efficient systems that reach all adults and involve all relevant stakeholders. The priorities are:

- Analyse the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning;
- Improve the quality of provision in the adult learning sector;
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one-step-up');
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes;
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.

Various activities took place, e.g. four regional meetings and three workshops, one on adult learning in higher education, a second on financing and a third one on basic skills. There were also activities directly related to the priorities:

¹ Most of the introduction is taken and adapted from the Action Plan on Adult Learning Report of the Adult Learning Working Group (December 2010)

Analysing the effect of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning

Priority Action 1 of the Action Plan called for an analysis of “the effects of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning”, for example the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the national qualifications frameworks.

Two studies were commissioned by the European Commission, the first was the 2008 study to develop a model to measure the impact of reforms². The second was the actual analysis of the impact of reforms in 31 countries carried out in 2009 and 2010³.

Improving the quality of provision in the adult learning sector

A competence profile for adult learning professionals⁴ was developed in 2009 and workshop on quality in adult learning was organised in 2010.

Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before ('go one step-up')

This priority focuses especially on the lower qualified and those with difficulties achieving a full qualification. The May 2008 Council Conclusions on adult learning recognised the need to raise the skills levels of a significant number of low-skilled workers with a view to enabling all citizens to adapt to technological change and future skills needs⁵.

A series of Peer Learning Activities (Dublin 2008; London 2009; Prague 2009; Oslo 2010) and a workshop (Brussels 2010) took place, a study and the production of the *Basic Skills: Policy and Practice Guidelines* based on the findings of the PLAs, the workshop and the study.

Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes

Validation is on the agenda for the coming years. The shift to learning outcomes and the implementation of NQFs is supporting these developments. Validation is seen as a way to make institutions and systems more flexible by broadening the skills and competences that qualifications systems recognise. It is also seen as a way to help

2 Public Policy and Management Institute (2010) Assessment of the impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on adult learning. Final Report. – <http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/reforms.pdf>

3 Research voor Beleid (forthcoming) Impact of ongoing reforms in education and training on the adult learning sector.

4 Research voor Beleid (2008) ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A study of the current situation, trends and issues. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/adultprofreport_en.pdf

5 Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:140:0010:0013:EN:PDF>

groups with particular needs, such as low-qualified individuals, migrants and early school leavers⁶.

A PLA on validation which took place in Prague in June 2009 showed that countries are at different stages in the development of policies and practices for validation. *The Inventory of Validation Policy and Practice in Europe*⁷ was updated in 2010 and the *European Guidelines on Validation*⁸ is being updated in 2010-2011. These two instruments will be closely linked to each other.

Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector

Challenges to the monitoring of the adult learning sector abound including: the diversity of the sector; the different potential sources of data; the fact that data collected supply mainly basic information only; the absence of national data chains; the weak analysis/use of national/regional data; the need to harmonise terminology⁹. At European level data on adult learning are limited. While the recent Adult Education Survey¹⁰ offers a comprehensive picture the reference period varies from country to country and the intention is that the study will be carried only every 5 years.

A PLA on monitoring took place in Bratislava in March 2009, and a study on European adult learning terminology and data was undertaken.

2. Summary of the EAEA survey

In February 2011, EAEA posted a survey on the EAEA website and informed its members via e-mail about it. We received 30 responses, which come from EAEA members and other visitors to the EAEA website.

72,4 % of the respondents indicate that they are aware of the Action Plan, 27,6 % are not. 51,7% are aware of NATIONAL activities / actions concerning the Action Plan, 27,6% are not, and 20,7% don't know.

When asked about the importance of the key challenges, the respondents rated it as follows.

- Analysing the effect of reforms in all sectors of education and training on adult learning - 24,1%
- Improving the quality of provision in the adult learning sector - 24,1%
- Increase the possibilities for adults to achieve a qualification at least one level

6 Cedefop (2010) A bridge to the future European policy for vocational education and training 2002-10
http://cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3058_en.pdf

7 Cedefop (2010) European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (not available on line yet).

8 Cedefop (2009) European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning.
http://www2.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/information_resources/europeaninventory/

9 See Final Report on the PLA on monitoring, Bratislava, March 2009 at www.kslll.net

10 http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-044/EN/KS-SF-09-044-EN.PDF

- higher than before ('go one step-up') - 24,1%
- Speed up the process of assessment of skills and social competences and have them validated and recognised in terms of learning outcomes - 20,7%
- Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector - 6,9%

We asked the respondents in which of the existing priorities they would suggest more and / or other activities and received the following recommendations:

Respondents especially underlined the importance of analyzing reforms and validation, but also quality. All three topics were mentioned at least three times. Monitoring was mentioned, too.

In connection with quality, improving the access and availability of ALE was underlined.

In addition to the existing priorities, the following recommendations were made:

- Certifying providers of non-formal ALE
- More opportunities for part-time studies
- More media presence about the importance/possibilities of AE
- Assessment of skills and assessment of skills and social competences
- Guidance, outreach
- Research to monitor effects of AE
- The action plan needs to reflect the additional resource required to ensure that the start of the learners journey is as high quality as the formal learning, otherwise we will continue to fail the marginalised groups we seek to recruit.
- More common activities concerning EQF/NQF and validation referring to non formal adult learning. Project funding should be linked to this. We suggest EAEA be given such an assignment by the Commission as a European hub for the non formal learning sector (the mainly NGO based sector)
- Developing more and better training for adult teachers/trainers. Transnational learning activities for teachers/trainers in co-operation with the civil society and work-life

For a future Action Plan the respondents suggested the following additional priorities, topics or activities

The responses can be grouped under the following topics:

Topics

The respondents propose a range of topics for prioritization, such as active citizenship and social cohesion, but also teacher training, second chance programmes, higher education for adults and learning cities and communities.

Structural, legislative and financial support

There is generally a demand for the stronger recognition of non-formal (adult)

learning, equal to the other sectors in education and training. Both the EU-level and the Member States are urged to increase the (financial) support and infrastructure for adult learning, especially in order to increase participation from marginalized groups. Partnership with and amongst NGOs working in the adult learning in order to bridge formal, non-formal and informal sectors are seen as crucial.

There is also the suggestion to establish partnerships and development programmes for the underdeveloped regions (with low participation of adults in learning) from the developed ones (e.g. Scandinavian countries).

Respondents also propose peer learning activities and study visits as well as an annual European platform for the dissemination of results and for the analysis of the state of art.

Research and awareness raising

Many of the respondents underline the need for more coherent and comparative research about adult education, such as a strong research and data collection base. Proposals refer to the learners and their benefits, capacities, but also reforms and labour market related research (e.g. companies).

The question of how adult education pedagogies could have a greater impact and influence on all education policy and practice is raised.

Finally, it is suggested that we need to improve the public's awareness of the adult learning opportunities and initiatives available for them.

We also asked about the role and expectations towards different stakeholders. **Concerning the European Commission, the respondents have the following expectations:**

There is a general call for a new action plan, with particular emphases on giving incentives and putting more pressure on member states to engage more in adult education, on setting deadlines and indicators at European level for implementing non-formal adult education monitoring them, on paying more attention to the new member states, on providing a strong and convincing LLL framework and on setting benchmarks and sticking to them; there is a general call for more and better financing, in connection with coherent planning and policy focus;

There is the proposal to set up national task forces (consisting of a wide range of stakeholders, incl teachers and learners) with objectives; also bringing together various initiatives under one umbrella;

There is also the suggestion to release a media marketing campaign for adult education.

Recommendations for national governments

There is a strong call for more priority given to adult education, along with appropriate funding and cooperation with adult education civil society. The respondents recommend to publicise the Action Plan through all the national networks, to participate and organise PLAs and conferences, to develop validation systems for non- and informal learning, to step up action in order to reach the benchmarks and improve national monitoring, to develop a valid national dialogue with NGOs and other stakeholders to reach for a bottom-up policy drive for action, to support training for teachers / trainers in ALE, to offer not only vocational training to the unemployed but also general adult education, to support learning for active citizenship and sustainable development and to guarantee access to adult education for all groups in society.

Recommendations for EAEA

EAEA should continue to lobby for a new Action Plan and organise conferences, seminar etc according to the issues and priorities. EAEA should support members to raise awareness for and help implement the plan and cooperate in productive ways with other partners and especially help the Action Plan be connected to real needs of end-users like its members. EAEA should provide information at national conferences.

More generally, we need to advocate for voice, visibility and value for adult education, lobby more towards the Commission, the Council and the Parliament and organise more common activities on political and practical levels.

We need to underline the big need for adult education not only for the purpose of employability.

We should stimulate co-operation between adult learning organisations. Continue the dialogue with the EU Commission and the parliament about practices and priorities; we should prepare analyses of practice in non-formal education in all countries and give recommendations for methodology and organization of non-formal education.

10 key messages for a follow-up of the Action Plan for Adult Learning

1. Europe needs a strong new Action Plan and Grundtvig programme

Adult education is important for individuals but also for societies. In order to reach the European benchmark of 15% of adults participating in lifelong learning, we will need strong efforts from many member states to take the necessary steps to achieve this. The last action plan has played a crucial role in raising the awareness for these steps and launching activities across Europe. These efforts have to be continued and stepped up.

Similarly, the Grundtvig programme has helped create a European area of adult education and has driven innovation and the transfer of knowledge and expertise. It is essential that the Grundtvig programme can continue and will have better and more resources in the new programme period.

2. Legislative framework and governance structures with civil society

Adult education needs a strong legislative framework at the national levels in order to be effective and to be integrated in a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy. The first Action Plan already provided an overview and comparison of reforms and their impact in the different member states, and this needs to be continued and reinforced.

A very important issue concerns governance structures at European, national and regional levels. Civil society organizations (including providers of adult education and learning) should be included in the relevant structures in order to ensure a practice- and learner-oriented approach and successful implementation of policies.

3. Quality

EAEA suggests that the work of the first Action Plan on the issue of quality be continued. Especially when it comes to staff development and training, further initiatives and improvements are still necessary.

4. Structural support and financing

Financing remains a key question in adult education, and there are very different traditions about who pays what for adult learning. The huge difference in participation rates, demonstrated both by the Labour Force Survey and the Adult Education Survey, is also due to the fact that some countries are investing a lot and others are investing nothing or very little.

Besides issues of support for individual learners, there is a need to stress structural support for adult education institutions. There are areas in adult education that can-

not finance themselves through fees (e.g. literacy) and also areas that are expensive but important (outreach activities to marginalized groups, for example). Also, if the demand for quality is taken seriously, structural support for the development of adult education staff is necessary. The new Action Plan needs to take these issues into consideration and foresee activities on this topic.

5. Validation of prior learning and flexible learning pathways

Adults should have the possibility to have their knowledge and skills recognized and validated and, if they wish, use this validation as an entrance into lifelong learning pathways. The Action Plan should contribute to the further development of validation systems across Europe and work closely with the development of National Qualification Frameworks. The interests of the learners should be put into the centre of these systems.

Non-formal (adult) learning needs to be a part of the NQFs and the Action Plan can play an important role in reinforcing this. Adult education civil society should be included in the developments of NQFs in order to ensure the learner-centred approach.

6. Research and knowledge base

The new Action Plan should continue to increase the knowledge and information about adult education in Europe. Any research should take existing knowledge into account and provide a real added value to it. Expertise in adult education research should be identified, and consolidated through a European network.

7. Ensuring access for all with a special focus on migrants

Existing research demonstrates the ‘Matthew-effect’ very clearly. The new Action Plan should focus on reaching out to the groups most distant to (adult) learning. We know already a lot about the barriers to learning, and it would be crucial to move to successful and effective outreach activities in this second phase of the Action plan¹¹.

We suggest that a particular focus should be put on migrants. This focus should include both the learning needs of migrants and the need for more intercultural dialogue between migrants and host societies.

8. Social cohesion and active citizenship

Both social cohesion and active citizenship should be important objectives of the new Action Plan. The work on ‘one step up’ – in combination with the work on access for all as mentioned above – should continue but active citizenship needs to be reinforced. It is also an important issue for adults and needs specific attention.

11 Later this year, EAEA will present a strategy paper on this issue

9. Benefits

Everyone agrees on the necessity for initial education, but for adult education we need to take an extra step and learn more about the wider benefits of adult education and learning. We therefore propose a particular emphasis - through studies and awareness raising - on the wider benefits of adult learning, both from an individual and a societal point of view.

10. Method and monitoring

We propose a continuation of PLAs, regional meetings, workshops etc. When it comes to studies, we propose a stronger emphasis on the quality of the research and a strong consideration of existing studies.

EAEA thinks that a European working group that consists of representatives of Member States and stakeholders including civil society should monitor the development of the implementation of the second Action Plan, too. This will increase the effectiveness of the activities but also the ownership of the new Action which we see necessary for a successful implementation.