Becoming the best

Educational ambitions for Europe

Foreword

Some years ago the Consortium of Institutes for Development in Education in Europe (CIDREE) decided to issue a yearbook in which important and relevant themes would be examined in depth and to which specialists working within the member institutes would be invited to contribute. In this way, it was felt that specialised know-how obtained by members of the eighteen semi-governmental institutes could be presented in an accessible manner for a general readership.

This is the third volume in the series, which began with two books dealing respectively with new trends in education and the absorption of refugees into the educational system.

The CIDREE institutes are all, in one way or another, deeply involved in the developments in education in Europe and so the choice of addressing the Lisbon declaration was an obvious and self-evident one.

All the institutes, which are members of CIDREE, are fervent proponents of the European ideal in education. This does not mean a suspension of critical faculties regarding recent developments which have resulted in strategic aims associated with the goals of and the Detailed Work Programme (with its 43 indicators and its five permanent priority benchmarks), rather it involves an ambitious programme which was worth the effort of the experts of the CIDREE institutes to address this European issue.

In order to guarantee the objectivity of the contributions the authors were specifically asked to write not from the viewpoint of their organisation or institute but to formulate comments and conclusions from the perspective of their individual fields of expertise.

Dr Roger Standaert
President of CIDREE

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Introduction

Roger Standaert

At this juncture, our society is turning from a (post)industrial society to one based on knowledge. Instead of the industrial way of organisation, which pervaded all spheres of life and became the community's hegemonial "way of life", we now have the network society (Castells). That network society is less uniform, more fragmented and more differentiated than its predecessor, as the result of a number of cohesive changes in major sub-areas of society: socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political.

Socio-economically, the structural change from an industrially based economy to one based on knowledge-intensive services is progressing further and a global internationalisation of markets, capital and investment flows and technological innovation is taking place. Technological changes are making the world increasingly knowledge-intensive with, as a result, rapidly outdated knowledge and a shift from the accent on professional qualifications to the emphasis on general key qualifications. In the wake of these changes in the area of economy, labour and technology, the world of lifestyles and social relationships is also undergoing change. The stability and security in the area of (routine) work, employer, place of residence, permanent networks of family and friends, the combination of work and family life is making way for individualism, (geographical) mobility, (psychological) flexibility, diversity and opportunities for choice and risk.

Socio-culturally, the trend is towards simultaneous globalisation and individualisation. The possibility of communication reaching the whole world instantaneously has changed the social texture of life. Information, news, views and ideas are no longer subject to the restriction of place and time, but disseminate worldwide in the blink of an eye. Globalisation is not only something that takes place solely outside the individual; it influences the private and personal aspects of life in the sense that it contributes to the deconstruction of traditions (Giddens). And where tradition is in retreat, the urge arises to make (individual) decisions and choices in a more open and reflective manner. Hierarchical relationships are making way for network patterns; society forms and memberships of organisations are undergoing change; religious practices are changing;

leisure time is being spent in other ways; individual and group aspirations are taking on other forms and values and norms are metamorphosing.

A socio-political search is underway for a new balance between centralisation and decentralisation; new roles are being allotted to national powers, states and regions. Here, individualisation is being translated into privatisation and deregulation and a greater emphasis on individual responsibility. While, on the one hand, this means more room for individual freedom, on the other it means the risk of exclusion, poverty and social deprivation for those unable to meet the demands of the new era.

As a result of these developments, education is gaining an increasingly major role in society. Individuals have to learn how to live in a world in which change has become endemic: social and communications skills are increasing in importance and characteristics pertaining to an independent learning approach driven by curiosity are becoming increasingly indispensable for functioning throughout society. Individuals have to learn how to find the right information, how to put that information into context, how to acquire general analytical skills, how to cultivate creativity, how to communicate, how to learn interpersonal and teamwork skills on top of individual expertise and mastery, how to share knowledge. The economy needs people who are creative, can solve complex problems, tackle new subjects, actively participate in thinking and acting with colleagues from both within and outside their own discipline, who are capable of making suggestions for improvement and renewal, can analyse their own activities and competencies and keep on learning, learning for the rest of their lives.

For the field of education, this means change. The need for change in education is not only indicated by external factors; educational theory development is seeing a paradigmatic shift, where the principles of constructivism are becoming increasingly dominant in the criteria for good education (CIDREE, 2001). The role of education is to help students discover the world. In a rapidly changing world, knowledge transferred by a teacher is no longer sufficient luggage for mentally reproducing reality efficiently. Moreover, the view that knowledge is a social construction, rather than an accurate reproduction of an absolute truth, is gaining ground. Furthermore, the idea is also becoming more popular that learning is not just about scope and level of knowledge, but that views, convictions, expectations, attitudes and thinking styles are also

essential, as they ensure that every student and every teacher experiences his own reality. Constructivism assumes that the student interprets, processes and (re)constructs the information he is given (in education) in relation to existing prior knowledge, skills, expectations and needs.

Those views have led to educationalists and teachers allotting the activities of the student, rather than the teacher, an increasingly central role as the guiding principle of education. It is not the process of knowledge transfer by the teacher, but the process of information gathering, processing and structuring by the student that is becoming the focal point. This changes the role of the teacher to more that of a facilitator, counsellor, coach and director of not only student-centred but also student-managed learning processes. Moreover, learning is not about reproducing knowledge; it is about the construction of knowledge and concerns not the correct solution to a problem as such - the result -, but the way in which the student arrives at a particular significant solution.

The "new" key role of education in society has led to the sector enjoying the lively interest of policymakers. In the European Union, that is expressed, despite the restrictions imposed by the Maastricht Treaty, in the more interventionistic European politics in the area of education, which have been deployed since the top conference in March 2000 in Lisbon. At that conference, the European Council (of leaders of state and government) established the following strategic objective for the European Union for the immediate future: "*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*". In the wake of this ambitious agenda, after preparatory work by the European Commission, strategic objectives for education were proposed by the European education ministers and adopted by the European Council. These objectives were consequently further specified in Barcelona, in 2002; a process was begun for formulating benchmarks for 2010, as a concrete elaboration of the chosen objectives, and a system was set in motion (the "Open Method of Coordination") for coordinating the Lisbon process, measuring progress and enabling the European member states to make mutual comparisons (European Commission, 2001 and 2002).

This extremely ambitious European educational policy is the central theme in this, the third CIDREE yearbook, continuing in the recent, but already familiar, tradition in which the CIDREE considers important subjects in the area of education in an internationally authoritative

publication. After the first yearbook, with its focus on paradigmatic shifts in educational thinking about learning and teaching, and after the second yearbook, focused on the theme of a Europe of differences and how we cope with minorities, we are now focusing on the mutual European educational policy.

In the light of the fact that one of CIDREE's primary objectives is to contribute to the ongoing process of international educational development and in view of the importance of the developments in European educational policy for both the policymakers in the field of education and for the teachers, CIDREE aims to achieve the following with this yearbook:

- to provide information on the direction in which European educational policy is shifting, a development with major implications for Europe in general and for the member states in particular, but not yet fully recognised by the diversity of layers involved in educational issues
- making a stimulating contribution to the lively debate on the content and effectiveness of this policy, on the Open Method of Coordination deployed in the context of this policy and on the large-scale formulation of benchmarks and indicators.

In this debate on the European educational policy proposed by the European Commission, the European Council and the European education ministers, the following themes can be distinguished:

- There are some doubts about the points of departure. Is there really a clear, linear development towards a knowledge economy? Do the requirements to be set for education, derived from the characteristics of that knowledge economy, really indicate a radical change in educational objectives, methods and concepts, instead of simply supplementation? Can institutionalised education actually fulfil the central role allotted to it in the knowledge economy? Is education not being seen too readily as the panacea for all problems in modern society? Or, at a more concrete level: is there a plain causal connection between investments in human capital and an increase in competitive capacity? (see, for example, the contributions by Standaert and Leney in this issue).

- Are we not cherishing rather too great expectations with regard to the practical effects of change in educational policy? Will changes in the policy actually have the assumed positive or negative effects on

the quality of education? And if so, will they have those effects in the time span allowed for the realisation of the objectives set by the European Union? (Halász deals with this problem in his contribution).

- To what degree are the intrinsic objectives of education subordinate to external objectives with regard to the economy and the job market? Is such subordination desirable? Is the educational (policy) agenda not determined to too large an extent by forces outside the field of education and is sufficient justice still being done to the extremely diverse and multiple expectations with regard to education in other fields of influence in society? (See, for example, the article by Hostens and Iliadis' contribution, which focuses on the Greek situation).

- No one would contest the desirability of a number of the European educational policy's concrete objectives – lowering the number of unqualified school-leavers, for example. There is, however, some doubt as to the technocratic character of and lack of transparency in decision-making and the chosen methods. Critics such as Standaert point to the fact that European parliamentary bodies are insufficiently involved in the decision-making and that insufficient attention is being devoted to and use made of the expertise of educational experts and the teachers themselves, with all the consequent resistance to and insufficient effectiveness of the deployed strategies. Based on her experiences in Wales, in her contribution in this context, Badham advances the thesis that locally determined strategies lead to more effective results than those established centrally. The question is whether the more or less centralised direction of the European educational policy is not at odds with international developments where the responsibility is being placed at the more meso level of the schools themselves (see contribution by Hooghoff and Letschert).

- Various contributions in this issue discuss whether the European educational policy that has been established tends too far towards uniformisation and, as such, devotes insufficient attention to the (so essential) national and regional cultural diversity. Questions posed here concern the legitimacy and effectiveness of an approach that intervenes in the value autonomy of countries and educational establishments and breaks down existing differences between member states.

- Many questions are posed regarding the appropriateness and feasibility of the chosen Open Method of Coordination, working with sets of benchmarks and indicators and their implementation. Does a commercial approach using benchmarks and performance indicators really fit in with the culture of education? Have the risks entailed in working with indicators actually been estimated well enough (reduction, teaching for the test, neglect of other areas)? Can reliability and validity problems be solved? Is it actually possible to arrive at sufficiently smartly formulated indicators within the time given? Can adequate definitions be found and can sufficient support be generated? Is the operation of progress monitoring and comparison not failing due to the inadequacy of existing information systems and the lack of sufficient valid data?

The collection of essays is organised in a threefold way.

Part one focuses primarily on the information behind the strategy. The backgrounds and history will be clarified and explained. The role of the benchmarks and indicators in the open coordination process are dealt with, as well as the experiences and reflections of four working groups concerning the Detailed Work Programme. The prospects for the new countries in this process are also discussed.

Part two contains critical views on the ambitions, principles, instruments and strategy.

The final part (part three) contains a collection of essays on national experiences and implementation strategies. Authors from various countries focus on the implementation of the common policy from different angles.

The separate appendices to this collection deal with the following:

The first section starts with a contribution by Gaby Hostens, the Flemish director-general of secondary education. He provides an illuminating analysis of what he calls "the game of policymaking in Europe". He looks at the recent history of educational policymaking in the European Union and maps out milestones in educational decision-making in the past five years. This "game" provides Europe with a rich harvest of important decisions, crucial conferences and interesting documents. It is no exaggeration to say that a European educational field is taking shape. His

outline contains fifteen stepping stones in the recent history of education policymaking.

Lars Bo Jakobsen, a member of the Directorate General for Education and Culture, explains the role of indicators and benchmarks within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Linked to the contribution by Hostens, he gives a more detailed outline of aspects of the background, referring to original texts in defining the Open Method of Coordination with its consequences in practice. He concentrates on the Lisbon process, starting from three overriding objectives, which were spelled out in thirteen sub-objectives, giving "substance" to the common concerns of education ministers. As a consequence of these thirteen "associated objectives" he describes the Detailed Work Programme adopted at the European Council meeting in Barcelona in 2002. From the 43 key issues elaborated upon in the Detailed Work Programme, the Commission has proposed five reference levels for European average performance. These five areas contain indicators and benchmarks to be reached by the year 2010. It concerns performance levels for:

- early school leavers
- graduates in mathematics, science and technology
- groups having completed upper secondary education
- key competencies
- lifelong learning.

A special place is reserved in this first section for a report on the eight working groups charged with the realisation of the 33 key issues of the Detailed Work Programme. As an example, the editor asked four Flemish representatives from four of these working groups to describe their experiences. This is, of course, a restricted view of the totality of the eight working groups. The aim of the article is to give an overview of the manner in which such working groups and commissions work on behalf of the European Commission.

The first section ends with an essay by Gábor Halász, who looks, in particular, at the role and position of new member countries. He describes the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) from the point of view of various players in a field of various forces. He distinguishes four different groups of players:

- EU level sectoral players (e.g. the Commission's education directorate)
- EU level non-sectoral players (e.g. the Commission's employment and social affairs directorate)

- member state level sectoral players (e.g. national education ministries and teachers' organisations)
- member state level non-sectoral players (e.g. national employment ministries or employer organisations, and trade unions).

According to Halász, the borderlines between the different sectors (education, employment, social affairs) are rather vague. The progress of integration in one sector automatically creates the need for stronger integration in another. It seems clear that if education ministries shy away from coordinating the policies of other sectors in Europe, the coordination of policies in their own sector will be carried out by others. Education in Europe has to develop its own procedure for the Open Method of Coordination. It is important, here, to distinguish between evaluating *policies* and evaluating the quality of *system*s.

In the various elaborations on indicators - and even in the Detailed Work Programme - there is persistent confusion between quality indicators (e.g. test scores) and policy indicators (parent participation, teacher training). A good policy can have bad quality results; bad quality in results can be accompanied by a strong and efficient policy.

The second section of the yearbook comprises three articles with a more constructively critical view.

From the educational point of view, Roger Standaert expresses some doubts about the speed, tempo and feasibility of the Lisbon process. He talks about the lack of participation on the side of the teachers and stresses the great significance of educational decisions. Debate and controversy are normal in educational innovations. A mass of innovation literature therefore demonstrates the long and winding road to realising such innovations. He draws our attention to an exaggerated focus on economic competition, while the connection between education and economic success is not a linear one. Finally, he argues against the persistent use of benchmarking in the implementation of innovations. Benchmarks should be exceptional in the sense that they should be reserved for well-chosen priorities.

The article by Louis Van Beneden is based on a critical approach to the European decision-making process. As an important member and past president of the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT), he questions the democratic character of the European education policy. He discusses the neglect of two relevant European institutions: the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR). He considers the Open Method of Coordination. He also pinpoints the

danger of the European policy process having become increasingly technocratic, at both European and national levels. He mentions a number of indispensable actions for guaranteeing a future in a democratically constructed Europe.

Based on experiences with benchmarks and target settings in Wales, Linda Badham sketches the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of policy. After definition and description of the characteristics of benchmarks, she deals with the problems of target setting, in particular the "averages" problem, the "comparable data" problem, the "perverse effect" problem and the "under influence" problem. She argues for convergence at the level of general aims in Europe rather than for specific common targets at present. The Detailed Work Programme does, however, give scope for testing the degree of effectiveness of the proposed specific benchmarks strategy.

Finally, Tom Leney of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority in England gives some critical remarks on the five priority benchmarks. His aim is to contribute to the impact of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on the identification and pursuit of the prioritised benchmarks for education and training. He deals with a number of questions concerning the identification of the five priorities. How did we get here? Where are we now and what is the significance of the particular benchmarks? Is there a roadmap? And what could be the plausible outcomes of this ambitious European project? He compares this approach with the results of the OMC, which has already been applied for several years in the fields of economy and employment. Based on those experiences, he analyses the benchmarks related to their economic starting points and to their feasibility in a Europe of 25 different countries.

The third section provides an overview of various national experiences within the process of developing and implementing a mutual strategy in educational reform, in the light of the ambitious aims of the heads of state and the European education ministers.

Nicholas Iliadis describes the difficulties and possibilities of the application of the thirteen associated objectives, expressed as a concretisation of the Lisbon decisions. He relates the implementation of these objectives to the Greek situation. Typical of Greek society as a whole, he points out that, in the field of education, general ideas relating to skills development, self-exploration and intellectual growth rate higher than ideas relating to technology and information technology.

In concluding, he takes account of the situation of the Greek curriculum and the European benchmarks and objectives that could provide a guiding framework for updating the Greek educational system.

The Dutch case study describes the national innovation policy, aimed at structural inclusion of cross-curricular themes, like the European and international dimension, in the regular school curriculum, as well as in teacher training programmes. The question in this education policy agenda is: "How will Europe offer broader prospects for further development, or will it become a straightjacket in the final agenda?" Jos Letschert and Hans Hooghoff focus on the case of the five-year innovation in upper secondary education and its effects.

Helmut Bachmann is the author of the essay on the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme in Austria. As an expert in working group G, he departs from the activities of this group to present his findings here, outlining the current measures and further steps for Austria. Finally, he sketches a number of possible measures with regard to the implementation of the Lisbon objectives.

Éva Balázs illustrates the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme for Hungary. She outlines the national strategy that has been adopted in Hungary to meet the key issues of the Work Programme. The application of the Lisbon process is easily facilitated there, as the policy developments in Hungary harmonise fully with the Lisbon goals. However, Hungarian experience emphasises the fact that the prospects for the following phases in implementing the Lisbon goals depend more on deploying the OMC among different interest groups than on the tools of the process.

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I Backgrounds

Educational policymaking in Europe: a new game

Gaby Hostens

When educational researchers will dig into the history of educational policymaking in the European Union (EU) and map out milestones in educational decision-making, the past few years will provide them with a rich harvest of important decisions, crucial conferences and interesting documents. Educational policymaking in the EU is in a frenzy.
A European education area is being shaped!

The Maastricht Treaty: Subsidiarity

During the Dutch Presidency in 1992 the heads of state reviewed the basic treaty of the EU to strengthen its foundations and to widen its remit.
Until then the Union's competences in education and training were strictly limited and heads of state wanted to keep it that way. They preferred to focus on integration of economic, employment, monetary, fiscal and budgetary policies rather than on integration or coordination of education and training policies in a common European framework. This was politically too sensitive an issue: education and training were too intimately linked with the historic and cultural context of the member states.

Still, education and training were seen as important tools to help implement major economic and employment policies and objectives in Europe. Enhancing employability has been a key objective in that European strategy and education and training have been obvious instruments to improve people's opportunities on the labour market
Still, the heads of state added new articles on education and vocational training to give education and training a more prominent standing in the European Union.

Education
Article 149 on education runs as follows: "*The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the*

Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity."

Community actions should be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, at teaching and dissemination of the languages of the member states, at encouraging the mobility of students and teachers, at encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study, at developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common the education systems of member states, etc.

Article 149 has led to the design and implementation of community programmes such as Erasmus, Comenius, Lingua, Arion etc. and all have been heavily subsidised by the European Commission.

Vocational training

Article 150 on vocational training has, basically, the same philosophy:
"The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training."

Community actions should aim at facilitating adaptation to industrial changes through vocational training and retraining, at improving initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market, at facilitating access to vocational training and encouraging mobility of instructors and trainers, at stimulating cooperation and training between educational or training establishments and firms, etc.

Article 150 has led amongst other things to the Leonardo programme, which has made a major contribution to the enhancement of quality in vocational training in EU countries. It has facilitated exchange of experience and information and has contributed to greater mobility of pupils and trainers.

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity in governance means that whatever can be decided and executed at a lower level shall be decided and executed at that level: member states remained thus fully competent in education and training matters.
While encouraging a European dimension in education and vocational training and encouraging mobility of students and teachers the heads of

state, by the same article, stressed the principle of subsidiarity! EU policies would respect cultural and linguistic diversity of the member states, and leaves full responsibility for education and training to the national authorities.

Moreover, as if to strengthen the idea of subsidiarity those same articles specified the ministers *"can adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States"* to contribute to the achievement of the objectives. Legal obligations, harmonisation of education and training systems were out of the question!

The Cologne Charter of the G8 (1999): Paving the way?

The challenge of the learning society

The heads of states of the world's richest nations, the G8, met in Cologne in June 1999. In the Cologne Charter "Aims and Ambitions for Lifelong Learning", adopted during their meeting, they argued for greater centrality of education and training in our societies and in policymaking:
"The challenge every country faces is how to become a learning society and to ensure that its citizens are equipped with the knowledge, skills and qualifications they will need in the next century. Economies and societies are increasingly knowledge-based. Education and skills are indispensable to achieving economic success, civic responsibility and social cohesion. The next century will be defined by flexibility and change; more than ever there will be a demand for mobility. Today, a passport and a ticket allow people to travel anywhere in the world. In the future, the passport to mobility will be education and lifelong learning. This passport to mobility must be offered to everyone."

Basic principles and essential building blocks of a LLL strategy

Investing in people is seen as the key to employment, economic growth and the reduction of social and regional inequalities. Investing in education and training will enhance sustainable development. Unless all stakeholders, governments, the private sector and individuals have a strong commitment to investing in lifelong learning, these social and economic objectives will not be met.

The charter identifies as essential elements of a strategy for lifelong learning and training: high-quality early years education, primary education that enables all children to achieve good competence in reading, writing, arithmetic, ICT and to develop social skills, secondary

education that develops the aptitudes and abilities of all students, vocational training that imparts skills attuned to the needs of the labour market and to the most up-to-date technology, higher education that offers opportunities to everyone capable of profiting from degree-level work, adult skill acquisition that enjoys appropriate public or employer support.

"At all stages emphasis should be given to the importance of creativity, entrepreneurship and education for democratic citizenship, including respect for the political, civil and human rights of all people, the value of tolerance and pluralism, and an understanding and respect for the diversity of different communities, views and traditions."

The G8 heads of state identified several strategies that are particularly effective to modernize education and training and to raise standards at all levels. Key building blocks in such a strategy are teachers, increased public and private investment at all levels, modern and effective ICT networks to support traditional methods of teaching and learning, continued development and improvement of internationally recognized tests to benchmark student achievement, promotion of the study of foreign languages, increased attention to the establishment of clear targets in terms of higher standards and levels of achievement and development of a culture of entrepreneurship in education.

The Cologne Charter paved the road for the Lisbon Declaration by the European heads of state.

The Lisbon Summit (March, 2000): The Lisbon Process

A strategic objective

The European Council of heads of state set a strategic goal for the Union for the next decade: *"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."* Achieving this goal will strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy.

That strategic objective requires an overall strategy aimed at preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society and at modernising the European social model by investing in people, building an active welfare state and combating social exclusion. Education and

training must play a crucial role in the implementation of that strategic goal.

An invitation to education ministers

The European Council invited the ministers of education *"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 (...) presenting a broader report to the European Council in the Spring of 2001".*

Education and training can contribute greatly to achieving common European objectives but, still, the heads stressed the idea of respect for national diversity. The principle of subsidiarity is to prevail in education and training policies: respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Lisbon Process was started and the Cologne Charter would strongly echo in the objectives report, a key European document on education and training.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC)

The heads of state set an ambitious strategic objective, invited the education ministers to have a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems and adopted a new "Open Method of Coordination" as a tool to steer and monitor progress of the Lisbon Process towards the strategic objective.

The OMC had proved its value to monitor employment and labour market policies in the member countries!

A definition

The OMC is a means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the common EU objectives. It involves fixing guidelines combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals, establishing where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world but tailored to the needs of different member countries and sectors. These indicators and benchmarks are a tool to compare best practice. European guidelines are translated into national policies by setting specific targets and designing policies, taking into account national and regional differences. The method also entails periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

As if to avoid being criticized for trespassing articles 149 and 150 of the treaty, the Lisbon declaration adds: *"A fully decentralised approach will*

be applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actually involved, using variable forms of partnerships."

The OMC is sometimes called "soft law" because guidelines are not strict or binding: it lays a moral obligation on national governments to perform better to achieve the commonly agreed targets.

Still, implementing the OMC is heavily criticised by some educationalists.

Peer review – Peer pressure

Peer review is a crucial instrument for making recommendations and exercising pressure on other states. It has not been rigorously defined but it has assumed a specific meaning in the practice of international organisations. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) carries out peer reviews in a great variety of policy fields: fiscal, environmental, economic, agricultural, educational, etc.

In a study "Peer review: A tool for cooperation and change", prepared by the OECD Directorate for Legal Affairs (September, 2002), the concept of peer review and peer pressure is being defined:

"Peer review can be described as the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of a State by other States, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed State improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles. The examination is conducted on a non-adversarial basis, and it relies heavily on mutual trust among the States involved in the review, as well as their shared confidence in the process. (...) Peer review tends to create, through this reciprocal evaluation process, a system of mutual accountability."

The effectiveness of peer review relies on the influence and persuasion exercised by the peers during the process: peer pressure.

"Peer pressure does not take the form of legally binding acts, as sanctions or other enforcement mechanisms. Instead, it is a means of soft persuasion which can become an important driving force to stimulate the State to change, achieve goals and meet standards".

The definition of the concept of peer review gives a better idea of what the OMC can be.

The OMC in European social policy

In a presentation "Including the Excluded. A European Commitment against poverty", Frank Vandenbroucke, federal minister for social affairs in Belgium, wrote in 2001:

"The OMC is designed to help Member States develop their own policies reflecting their individual national situations, share their experience and review their outcomes in a transparent and comparable environment. It is therefore a method that builds on and respects local diversity; it is flexible and simultaneously aims at ensuring progress in the social sphere". The minister is convinced the OMC can be an effective tool to combat social exclusion, can lead to a common understanding of our core social values and help policymakers define in a more precise way the substance of the European Social Model. *"It has the potential to be a powerful driver to improve the quality of social protection in Europe."*

The objectives report (2001)

The education ministers took that Lisbon invitation to heart and in early 2001 they produced a document "Report from the Education Council to the European Council on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems".

They stressed that education has an important role in promoting humanistic values shared by our societies. They reviewed the general objectives which society attributes to education and training: the development of the individual, of society and of the economy. Yet, they also reviewed some of the challenges Europe has to face in the decades to come: changes in working life, society, demography and migration, achieving equal opportunities for all and fighting social exclusion. Of particular importance is the demographic changes within the teaching profession: *"Within the Union about half of teachers are aged 40 or more and 20% will have retired within the next ten years."*
Accession of new countries to the Union will make these challenges even more complex to tackle.

Their objectives for our education and training systems are ambitious: better quality, more effective use of human and financial resources, more equitable access for all, greater relevance to the wider world.

The ministers have adopted three strategic objectives:
- Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU.
- Facilitating the access of all to the education and training systems.
- Opening up education and training systems to the wider world.

These three major strategic objectives are broken down into thirteen associated objectives.

Better quality and more effective use of resources
If we want Europe to become a more dynamic and competitive society in an increasingly globalising world we must raise the quality of education and training. Its citizens must have ample opportunities to develop their skills and competencies and realise their full potential. They are at risk of being excluded in the knowledge society.

This strategic objective has five associated objectives:
- improving education and training for teachers and trainers
- developing skills for the knowledge society (increasing literacy and numeracy; updating the definition of basic skills for the knowledge society; maintaining the ability to learn)
- ensuring access to ICT for everyone (equipping schools and learning centres; involving teachers and trainers; using networks and resources)
- increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical studies
- making the best use of resources (improving quality assurance and ensuring efficient use of resources).

Equitable access for all
Policymakers must facilitate access of all to education and training in a lifelong learning perspective: provision must be more flexible and more attractive to young people and adults, better attuned to their needs. High quality education and training for all is essential if we want to build an inclusive society.
More equitable access to high quality education and training for all will be enhanced through three associated objectives:
- open learning environment
- making learning more attractive
- supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion.

Greater relevance to the outside world
Education and training systems must deliver high quality, use resources effectively and be accessible to all. They must also be relevant to the outside world and open up to the influence of all parts of society. All citizens must learn skills to live and work in a growing international and multicultural society.

The following five associated objectives will contribute to achieving the objective of greater relevance:
- strengthening the links with working life and research, and society at large
- developing the spirit of enterprise
- improving foreign language learning
- increasing mobility and exchanges
- strengthening European cooperation.

In that same, ambitious, report the ministers of education announced a detailed plan how to implement the objectives report and the Open Method of Coordination. Their workplan for 2001: defining how to measure the achievement of the concrete objectives, undertaking concrete work for each of the objectives; identifying areas suitable for peer review and exchange of good practice, assessing benchmarks and benchmarking.

The Lisbon Process in the field of education and training is gaining momentum and the monitoring instrument, the OMC, is being shaped. The Lisbon Process is taking a fast start, but even more important, education and training are becoming more central in European social and employment policies. High quality and responsive education and training systems are being seen as critical in tackling a wide range of societal problems such as unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health, crime, etc.

Detailed Work Programme for the implementation of the thirteen objectives

In 2001 a Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe was drafted by the European Commission and discussed in the Education Committee and Education Council.

An ambitious agenda
The objectives report was an ambitious document. The Detailed Work Programme has an even more ambitious agenda to be achieved in education and training by 2010:
- *"the highest quality will be achieved in education and training and Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions*

- *education and training systems in Europe will be compatible enough to allow citizens to move between them and to take advantage of their diversity*
- *holders of qualifications, knowledge and skills acquired anywhere in the EU will be able to get them effectively validated throughout the Union for the purpose of career and further learning*
- *Europeans, at all ages, will have access to lifelong learning*
- *Europe will be open to cooperation for mutual benefits with all other regions and should be the most-favoured destination of students, scholars and researchers from other world regions."*

The EU wants to benchmark the performances of its education and training systems against the best in the world. The OMC as *"a means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals"* will be the appropriate instrument for education ministers and the European Commission to steer and monitor the process.

A single format for each associated objective

The Detailed Work Programme has laid down a single format for each of the thirteen associated objectives: rationale, key issues, organisation of the follow-up (starting period, indicators for measuring progress, themes for exchanging experiences, good practice and, as appropriate, peer review). That format provides the working groups with a "unified" workplan.

An example: Improving education and training for teachers and trainers

The Detailed Work Programme has identified 43 key issues across these thirteen associated objectives. The first of these objectives, improving education and training for teachers and trainers, has four key issues:

- *"identifying the skills that teachers and trainers should have, given their changing roles in knowledge society*
- *providing the conditions which adequately support teachers and trainers as they respond to the challenges of the knowledge society, including through initial and in-service training in the perspective of lifelong learning*
- *securing a sufficient level of entry to the teaching profession, across all subjects and levels, as well as providing for the long-term needs of the profession by making teaching and training even more attractive*
- *attracting recruits to teaching and training who have professional experience in other fields."*

An indicative list to measure progress towards improving education and training for teachers and trainers contains three indicators:

- shortage/surplus of qualified teachers and trainers on the labour market
- progression in number of applicants for training programmes (teachers and trainers)
- percentage of teachers and trainers who follow continuous professional training.

This list of indicators can be reviewed in the course of time.

Five themes for exchange of experience and good practice and, as appropriate, for peer review have been identified: evaluation of training programmes for teachers and trainers; conditions for becoming a teacher or trainer according to education level; inclusion of such subjects as ICT, foreign languages, European dimension of education and intercultural education; in study and training plans; promotion systems in the teaching profession during a teacher's career; improvement of working conditions of teachers.

High quality teachers and trainers are seen as critical for high quality education and training for all and the follow-up of the first of these thirteen associated objectives will study in detail the teaching career in the European Union: recruitment, content of initial teacher training, professional development, social status, working conditions, teacher labour market, etc.

These are the critical issues education authorities in all member countries are facing, if not trying to tackle.

Benchmarks and benchmarking

A definition

The European Commission has published a document on *"European benchmarks in education and training: follow-up to the Lisbon European Council"*.

The term "benchmark" refers to concrete targets against which progress can be measured by education authorities. "Benchmarking" is used in a comparative perspective: *"data are presented with a view to identifying the relative performance of individual countries in the EU or in Europe more broadly"*. Where possible, European performances will be

benchmarked against the *"wider world"* as represented by the USA and Japan.

Policy rationale

The ministers want *"Europe to be recognised as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions"*.

Carefully selected indicators are meant to measure present levels of performance but also to measure progress. Indicators, along with exchange of good practice and peer review will help push national education authorities to benchmark their policies against best practice in Europe and in the world.

Benchmarks, concrete targets, will be set for 2004 and 2010 and they must put pressure on national authorities to effectively implement the objectives report, thus contributing to achieving the strategic objective: *"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."*

Two examples

The Detailed Work Programme has benchmarked average European performances for two objectives, *developing skills for the knowledge society* and *making the best use of resources,* against the average of the three best performing countries in the EU and against the USA and Japan. In this way, national education authorities can analyse the impact of their policies and measure the returns on their investment in a comparative perspective.

Making the best use of resources

	Present Levels			
	EU Average (1999)	Average of 3 best performing in EU (1999)	USA (1998)	Japan (1998)
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of the GOP	5.0%	7.3%	5.0%	3.5%

Developing skills for the knowledge society

	Present Levels			
	EU Average (1)	Average of 3 best performing in EU	USA	Japan
Numeracy/ mathematics (scores)	494	528	493	557
Literacy (scores)	498	532	504	522

Source: PISA, OECD, 2001

To monitor progress in the implementation of the objectives report the
EU will build on and complement the work of other international
organisations such as OECD and the Council of Europe. The OECD
indicator database will be a prime source for indicators and benchmarks

but new indicators are likely to be developed. Statistical and analytical capacities will have to be strengthened in our ministries.

A crucial, a sensitive, a difficult issue

Setting benchmarks and benchmarking is a crucial tool to effectively monitor progress towards achieving the Lisbon strategic objective. The heads of state can learn how much progress has been made, what policy fields have been left behind and what countries are trailing behind. Indicators, benchmarks and benchmarking put pressure on national authorities to perform better to achieve the commonly agreed targets and standards.

Selecting indicators, setting benchmarks and benchmarking are highly political operations and thus, very sensitive. The principle of subsidiarity is at the heart of the political debate: can primary responsibility for educational policymaking shift from member states to the EU?

All authorities involved, whether European or national, must strike a delicate balance between subsidiarity and (soft) pressure by the OMC.

So far no decisions have been taken on the selection of benchmarks, but the European Commission and the education ministers are running out of time. Some member countries fiercely oppose benchmarks! Discussions are still continuing!

In May 2003 the ministers of education were to decide on the adoption of an initial selection of European benchmarks in five areas: early school leavers; graduates in mathematics, science and technology; population having completed upper secondary education; key competencies and lifelong learning. No benchmark was set for a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human resources, although the Lisbon summit called for such an increase.

The whole process of developing indicators, setting benchmarks and benchmarking is also a technically complex operation. Too often data are criticized for the lack of quality and comparability. Hence, there is urgent need for national education authorities to build strong statistical and analytical capacities in their ministries.

Fifteen quality indicators of lifelong learning: A European report

The first European report on quality indicators of lifelong learning was published in June 2002. It examines the quality of lifelong learning in 35 European countries in four central areas: skills, competencies and

attitudes; access and participation; resources for lifelong learning and strategies and systems.

The fifteen indicators are situated in these four central areas:

- skills, competencies and attitudes: literacy; numeracy; new skills for the learning society; learning-to-learn skills; active citizenship, cultural and social skills
- access and participation: access to lifelong learning; participation in lifelong learning
- resources for lifelong learning: investment in lifelong learning; education and learning; ICT in learning
- strategies and systems: strategies for lifelong learning; coherence of supply; guidance and counselling; accreditation and verification; quality assurance.

The standing group on indicators has made extensive use of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), OECD and Eurostat databases for most indicators but few or no data are available on strategies and systems.

The report shows clearly that not all countries are performing well in laying the foundations for lifelong learning: PISA data on reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy among 15 year-old pupils reveal high numbers of low performing pupils in most countries and huge disparities among countries and among regions within countries.

There are huge disparities in investment in lifelong learning among countries as well.

The report identifies five key challenges for promoting quality of lifelong learning in the future: the skills, competencies and attitudes challenge; the resource challenge; the challenge of social inclusion; the challenge of change and the challenge of data and comparability.

Many data are lacking and too often comparability is questionable!
Many, if not all countries will have to develop statistical capacity in their ministries to improve data collection and enhance comparability of data.

Implementation of the work programme

A complex operation
Organisation of the implementation of that ambitious European programme is a particularly complex operation: a strict timetable, substantive work on a great diversity of objectives and issues, development of indicators and benchmarks, involvement of representatives of member countries and regional authorities, involvement of a great many stakeholders such as social partners, teaching unions, parents' organisations, education councils, input of experts, etc.

Clusters and working groups
The European Commission has analysed the Detailed Work Programme and has grouped the thirteen objectives into eight clusters: teacher and trainer education; basic skills, foreign language teaching, entrepreneurship; ICT in education and training; increasing participation in math and science; resources; mobility in European cooperation; open learning environment, active citizenship, inclusion; making learning attractive, strengthening links with working life and society.

Each cluster has its own working group and there is a standing group on indicators which oversees the use of indicators and benchmarks in the objectives work. For each of these working groups a timetable and a calendar of meetings have been laid down.

To ensure coherence of the work a common three-stage work sequence should apply: definition of key issues and identification of themes for the exchange of good practice and peer review; actual exchange of good practice and peer review and finally analysis of examples of good practice and suggestions for political recommendations.

Interim report: spring 2004
July 1st, 2003 is the deadline for all groups to make a first contribution. This will put the European Commission in a position to adopt a draft report on the implementation of the work programme by November 2003, which must be submitted to the spring meeting of heads of state under the Irish presidency in 2004.

Barcelona summit (March 2002)

The heads of state met in Barcelona and put education and training even more centre stage in European policies as they specified in some detail what they want to achieve in basic skills: *"to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age: establishment of a linguistic competence indicator in 2003; development of digital literacy: generalisation of an internet and computer user's certificate for secondary school pupils"*.
However, they did not specify what "from a very early age" means but they advertised the European Computer Driving Licence, which is a controversial commercial initiative, at least in the Flemish educational community.

In the same Barcelona declaration the heads of state want *"further action to introduce instruments to ensure transparency of diplomas and qualifications and closer cooperation with regard to university degrees in the context of the Bologna process; similar action should be promoted in the area of vocational training."*
The Bruges process for vocational education and training is firmly set on the European education agenda and good practice from the Bologna process in higher education must be used to advantage of the Bruges process.
But even more important, the heads of state in their declarations, stress again and again how important education and training are for sustainable development: economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection.

Enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training (VET)

The Bologna process was launched in 1999, the Bruges process was launched during the meeting of the director-generals of vocational training (DGVT) under the Belgian presidency in autumn 2001.

Bologna process: Paving the way
At a European level of higher education, education and learning must be organised in such a way that students can move freely between institutions, systems and countries. To achieve this goal a transparent structure, transfer of credits and minimum standards across that higher education level are needed: the bachelor-master degree structure, a

European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and accreditation of institutions and studies.

These issues are at the heart of the Bologna process.

Rationale for enhanced cooperation in VET

Vocational education and training at all levels is highly fragmented and transfer of qualifications and competences from one setting or country to another is difficult. Quality of VET varies considerably within Europe and a rapid proliferation of VET providers outside the established systems makes it extremely difficult to ensure high quality.

VET in Europe suffers from the same weaknesses as higher education in Europe: no transparent structures, no minimum standards and no credit transfer systems.

Such weaknesses are serious obstacles to mobility of workers and make it difficult for labour markets to be more flexible and more responsive to global challenges and changes. This explains the need for a process in VET similar to the Bologna process. The Bruges process!

The Bruges process

The director-generals of vocational training agreed that cooperation in VET requires a broad focus, covering issues of transparency, recognition of qualifications and quality. They took a long-term perspective, and wanted the process to be bottom-up. EU member countries, candidate countries as well as members of the European Economic Association (EEA) should be involved along with social partners.

Since autumn 2001 several priority areas for increased cooperation in vocational education and training have been identified: transparency of vocational qualifications and competences, recognition of vocational qualifications (regulated and non-regulated professions) and competences, quality of vocational education and training, development of European/international qualifications at sector/branch level.

Work is now being carried out on the development of a single tool to support transparency of vocational qualifications, on the development of an instrument for credit transfer and on criteria and principles for quality in VET.

Yet, the Council Resolution and the Copenhagen Declaration (November 2002) on enhanced cooperation in VET have so far been the most important political and substantive input into the Bruges process.

Political commitment to enhanced European cooperation in VET

In the Resolution and Declaration the ministers of education mapped out the political and educational context for enhanced cooperation in VET: enlargement of the European Union, the Bologna declaration and the European area for higher education, the Lisbon summit and its belief in the important role of education as an integral part of economic and social policies, the objectives report and the Detailed Work Programme. The ministers also refer to the Barcelona summit, which called for further action to introduce instruments to ensure greater transparency of diplomas and qualifications.

Design of a single transparency framework, a credit transfer system in VET and the development of quality tools are confirmed as the three initial priorities in the Bruges process.

A common framework for integrated approach towards a "Europe of knowledge"

Over the past two years the European Commission has published some key documents on education and training: "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality", "The E-learning Action Plan", "Designing Tomorrow's Education and Skills" and "Commission's Action Plan for Skills and Mobility".

In all these documents priority areas and key measures have been identified, recommendations have been made. Those different programmes and activities need more efficient coordination. The Detailed Work Programme on the objectives of education and training systems provides the European Commission exactly with such a coherent framework to organize its activities and programmes in an integrated way.

By matching the many different priorities with the objectives and key issues in the Detailed Work Programme the Commission brings together a wide range of dispersed activities in one coherent framework.

In that framework – An integrated approach towards a Europe of knowledge – the many objectives, priority actions, recommendations and measures identified in those key documents and programmes are matched with the objectives and key issues of the Detailed Work Programme. Implementation of the enhanced cooperation in VET will be gradually integrated in that framework.

It provides the Commission with a tool to maximise synergies and coherence among a great many programmes and activities and it gives a comprehensive overview of the follow-up of the Lisbon Process.

Centrality of education and training in knowledge–based societies

Education and training are central in the political strategy of the heads of state to implement the Lisbon objective of sustainable development: *"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."*

Social policy is also crucial in implementing this objective. Education and training and social policies are intertwined.

European Social Policy Agenda

The European Commission published a document "Social Policy Agenda". *"This Social Policy Agenda forms part of an integrated European approach towards achieving the economic and social renewal outlined at Lisbon."*

The Social Policy Agenda will *"accelerate the development of the knowledge-based economy to create more jobs in Europe"* and several actions related to education and training are recommended: closer cooperation at European level between research institutions, universities and school, reinforcement of the scientific culture of European citizens, attracting more people into scientific and technological professions. The European Social Policy Agenda calls for promoting the employability and access of women to ICT and other scientific and technological jobs, particularly by enhancing the participation of women in relevant education and training. Social partners are invited to focus their discussions on lifelong learning and new forms of work related to information technology.

A new investment paradigm in education and training: from government consumption to knowledge investment

Many people consider expenditure on education and training to be the main driver of growth in knowledge-based economies, enhancing well-being of our societies by strengthening social cohesion. Hence, a new document by the European Commission "Investing Efficiently in Education and Training. An Imperative for Europe".

The Commission sets out its view on the main factors shaping the new investment paradigm in education and training: the requirements of the knowledge society, globalisation and worldwide competition, enlargement of the Union.

An analysis of trends in expenditure on education and training reveals that the EU suffers from a global under-investment in the development of human resources.

The Commission *"invites member states to provide the level of public investment called for by the European social model, to put in place partnerships and incentives for more and sustained investment from enterprises and individuals, to focus funding on areas where it is most likely to produce the highest quality of outcomes, and to undertake reforms concerning curriculum, quality and recognition with a view to maximising their efficiency in the European context"*.

This document is a major input into the public debate on the implementation of the Lisbon Process but it also fits into the debate on European benchmarks and benchmarking. The Lisbon summit called for or a *"substantial annual increase in the per capita investment in human resources"*!

A European education area

The lifelong learning agenda and the Lisbon strategic objectives are a new paradigm for most educational policymakers. They require new approaches to curriculum design, funding, school management, etc. and it gives a new urgency to equity and quality in education: high quality education and training for all.

But the new paradigm has facilitated the impact of other policymakers on education and training policies. They are genuinely interested in education and training as instruments to promote employability, to foster social cohesion, to increase economic growth and to facilitate active citizenship.

Trends and drivers

Many educationalists in Europe are critical of the European educational policy agenda because the main drivers are policy domains and trends outside education. Employment, social affairs, effective use of human and financial resources, research and innovation, sustainable development, technology, demography, globalisation, etc. help shape or are shaping the education agenda. Societal demands and expectations of education and training are diverse and manifold, other ministers and

portfolios take an interest in education and training to achieve their own goals. Are education ministers still in control of their agendas?

It is their duty to enhance ownership of the European education agenda among the wider education community. Unless they feel involved in setting that wider European agenda their influence may be marginal in policymaking in that Europe of knowledge (European area of research and innovation, European area of education and training, European higher education area, European area of lifelong learning). They must contribute substantially to setting the agenda of that Europe of knowledge if they do not want the democratic deficit to grow!

Subsidiarity

Are national education ministries still steering education and training policies in the member countries?

Many of the associated objectives, such as developing skills for the knowledge society, improving foreign language teaching, making learning more attractive, etc. will have a strong impact on the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and vocational training in the member countries. These objectives are likely to change national curricula and to have an impact on mobility of teachers and pupils.

Benchmarks and benchmarking will put pressure on national authorities to adapt their education and training systems to broader European objectives.

Striking a balance between the principle of subsidiarity and the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination, the soft European law, is a delicate exercise and a sensitive political issue.

A larger playing field for educational policymakers?!

The greater diversity of societal expectations and demands, a great many deep trends and new developments have contributed to put education and training policies at the heart of European and national policies. Education and training have become tools to implement a wide range of other policy goals: a support tool for economic, labour market, regional, cultural and social policies.

New providers of education and training outside the established systems are operating in our countries, new certifiers of qualifications and competences are competing with traditional certifiers, ICT and the internet are facilitating all forms of learning, whether formal, informal or non-formal, liberalisation of trade in educational services is on the

agenda of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) negotiations under the umbrella of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Traditional providers of education and providers are operating in that new context and are competing with these newcomers.

What about educational policymakers? What about education ministers? Are they still playing on their old, cosy playing fields or are they already playing on larger, very different playing fields where they meet different players who play by different rules, who use other policy tools? They compete with ministerial portfolios that use more "mature" policy tools and have fully integrated them in the game: setting measurable goals, using indicators and benchmarks, benchmarking the output and outcomes of performances, identifying themes for peer review, measuring return on investment, etc. These tools traditionally applied in other ministries are likely to be transferred to education ministries. Forward-looking ministers of education use such tools to put pressure on their colleagues!

Are they interested in meeting new players and interact with them? Do they want to play on that larger playing field? Can they get used to playing by different rules?

Only lifelong learners and learning organisations will successfully meet these challenges!

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The role of indicators and benchmarks within the Open Method of Coordination

Lars Bo Jakobsen

Introduction

On 5 May 2003, the Education Council took another ambitious step in moving forward the Lisbon Strategy in the area of education and training, by adopting conclusions on "reference levels of European average performance" or European benchmarks[1].

The Council set five concrete benchmarks for the improvement of education and training systems in Europe up until 2010. The five adopted benchmarks are:

- by 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers should be achieved
- the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology in the European Union should increase by at least 15% by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease
- by 2010, at least 85% of 22 year-olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education
- by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15 year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000
- by 2010, the European Union average level of participation in lifelong learning, should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group).

After the Council meeting, the European Commissioner for Education and Culture, Viviane Reding said:
"By focussing on knowledge, education and training, we deliver what concerns our citizens most - prosperity, more and better jobs, greater social cohesion and a cleaner environment. Without first-rate lifelong learning institutions giving us a skilled, flexible workforce, without a cohesive society were everybody contributes, without research into world-

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[1] Please see annex for the full text of the Council conclusions adopted on 5 May 2003.

*beating products, without the stimulus to help business turn knowledge
into commercial opportunities, it will not be possible to achieve the
Lisbon ambition of becoming the most competitive economy in the world
with greater social cohesion".* She added: *"Let us not be afraid of learning
from the experiences of the best member states. Let us use benchmarks
and benchmarking as a tool for initiating dialogue and learning processes
among policymakers and the education community".*

This chapter is about the role of indicators and benchmarks in the Open
Method of Coordination (OMC). The point of departure is a brief historic
overview of European cooperation in the area of education. The
conclusion of the European Council meeting in Lisbon is examined. The
process of implementing the OMC in the area of education and training is
explored and the reasons for benchmarks and benchmarking at European
level are highlighted.

Some backgrounds

European cooperation in the area of education and training has taken big
strides since the timid beginning in 1971 when the then six ministers of
education met for the first time (Hingel, 2001). In the area of education
main events include:
*   In 1987, the Erasmus programme on student mobility was set up. The
    programme has since contributed to intra-European mobility of more
    than one million students.
*   In 1993, with the entry into force of the Maastricht treaty, the EC
    was given clear powers in the area of education by an article in the
    treaty (then article 126, now 149). Article 149's first paragraph states
    that in the field of education: *"the Community shall contribute to the
    development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between
    member states and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing
    their action".*
*   In 1995, the first Socrates programme was adopted covering school
    education (Comenius), adult education and other educational strands
    (later named Grundtvig), languages (Lingua), and ICT (Minerva). In
    2000, a second phase of the Socrates programme running up to 2006
    was adopted.

In the area of vocational training, the support of governments for
European cooperation was probably secured easier than in the area of
education. The Council of Ministers established CEDEFOP, the European
Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, in 1975, and a

number of initiatives in the late 1980s were precursors to what is now the Leonardo da Vinci programme, adopted in 1994.

However, in contrast to education already the treaty of Rome (article 128) made reference to vocational training. With the entry into force of the Maastricht treaty, vocational training policy was incorporated in the treaty article 127 (now 150). Article 150's first paragraph states that in the field of training: *"the Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the member states, while fully respecting the responsibility of the member states for the content and organisation of vocational training"*.

However, until 2000 the main focus of European cooperation was clearly the education and training programmes. Member states were not willing to grant the Community political power in an area, which was deemed too close to national identity for significant European political involvement. Hence sensitive political initiatives like the Bologna process (Bologna Declaration, 1999) on harmonisation of higher education structures, second chance schools[2] on combating social exclusion and indicators of quality of education[3] were taken outside the institutional framework of the Community. Therefore, political cooperation was sporadic and piecemeal, and the strongest evidence of the powers gained in the Maastricht treaty is the adoption of two recommendations in the field of quality evaluation (Recommendation, 1998 and 2001).

A decisive step in Lisbon

When European heads of state and government (European Council) met in Lisbon in March 2000 the atmosphere was optimistic. The Union was experiencing its best macro-economic outlook for a generation. Most European countries experienced moderate to high economic growth, and there was a general belief that information and communication technology (ICT) could provide a new and revolutionised way of organising the economy. However, the European Council also had a

[2] One of the follow up initiatives of the white paper "Teaching and learning-towards the Learning society", which was published during the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996.
[3] Initiatives on quality of school education (1998) and of lifelong learning (2000) were taken in the framework of the two-yearly meeting of education ministers from EU countries meeting their counterpart in candidate countries.

nagging worry, namely that the US economy grew at a rate consistently higher than the EU. In addition employment rates and labour productivity were also higher in the US. In other words, in spite of the internal market, the successful introduction of the Euro, and strengthened coordination of employment and economic policies, in a long-term perspective, the consequence would be a lower relative weight of the EU in the world economy.

In order to remedy this situation, the meeting of the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 underlined the need for undertaking both economic and social reforms as part of a positive strategy, which combined competitiveness and social cohesion[4]. Furthermore, the European Council provided fresh policy impetus to a number of policy areas including employment, information society, research and education and training. These policy areas were believed to have a clear positive impact on growth, employment and labour productivity. Furthermore, the rapid and accelerating pace of change meant it was urgent for the Union to act, in order to harness the full benefits of the opportunities presented by the "new economy". Therefore, the so-called Lisbon strategy adopted at the European Council spring summit set a new strategic goal for the European Union, namely that of becoming:

 "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".

Note that the European Council wanted it both ways i.e. *most competitive and dynamic,* but at the same time *greater social cohesion.* Therefore, greater economic dynamism should not be achieved through a more unequal income distribution.

The importance of the European Council in Lisbon cannot be overestimated regarding its implications for the development of a coherent approach to policy making at European level in the education and training area.

First, because it provided a new strategic goal for the European Union, a goal which had a strong resonance for education and training policies. In fact, a "knowledge-based economy" appears to be a prerequisite for

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[4] See Lisbon conclusions paragraph 4.

"sustainable economic growth" for "more and better jobs" and for "greater social cohesion".

Secondly, and even more significantly, the European Council invited ministers of education "to reflect on the concrete future objectives of education systems", and to concentrate on "common concerns and priorities". This was in itself a revolutionary task (Hingel, 2001). Cooperation in the policy domain had hitherto emphasised the diversity of European education systems – a concern, which is also underlined in the treaty article 149: "*fully respecting the responsibilities of the member states for the content of teaching and the organisation of educational systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity*".

Thirdly, by already deciding on benchmarks and guidelines[5] in the area of education and training, the European Council highlighted the importance of ambitious targets in the Lisbon strategy. It was an implicit "we mean business" reminder that the Lisbon strategy would come to nothing without ambitious targets and effective monitoring of progress. Moreover, it was a signal to ministers of education that they should have a more proactive approach to policy-making at European level.

Finally, the European Council indicated how to implement the strategic goal of becoming the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world, namely by applying the Open Method of Coordination.

What is the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)?

In Lisbon heads of state defined the OMC in the following way:
"*Implementation of the strategic goal will be facilitated by applying a new Open Method of Coordination as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals. This method, which is designed to help member states to progressively develop their own policies, involves:*
- *fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;*

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[5] For instance, heads of state called for "a substantial annual increase in per capita investment in human resource" and for "halving, by 2010, the number of 18-24 year-olds with only lower-secondary education who are not in education and training".

- *establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different member states and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;*
- *translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;*
- *periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes."*

This proposed "Open Method of Coordination" is inspired by economic policy coordination that, through the broad economic policy guidelines, has taken place since 1993 with the entering into force of the Maastricht treaty, and the preparation of the Economic and Monetary Union. Moreover, the European Employment strategy, which was launched by the Luxembourg European Council in 1997 and codified in the Amsterdam treaty offers another early example of the OMC in action. In these two areas, however, the OMC is enshrined in the treaty, whereas the Lisbon conclusions are the only legitimisation in other policy areas[6].

The OMC distinguishes itself by the non-compulsory character of its rules or guidelines. It is soft-law in policy areas where member states do not see the need for a regulatory framework at EU level. Nevertheless, it is a method that involves member states in setting guidelines and goals for the European Union, and engages them in mutual learning processes that allow the Union to converge towards these goals.

The development of the OMC should be seen in the context of the loss of a number of policy instruments. As a consequence of the Economic and Monetary Union instruments like devaluation, adjustment of interest rates, budget deficits, state aid etc. were not longer available for tackling employment and social issues. However, this loss of national autonomy in the economic area increased the need for new policy development in areas like employment, social policy, research, education and training etc.

Therefore, the OMC was invented as a method for modernising the European social model while respecting national diversity. The OMC

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[6] See Birgitte Bentzen "Åben koordination – fup eller fakta? (2003)" for a historic overview of the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination.

allows for increasing coordination between member states of a given policy field as well as coordination between different policy fields. It offers the possibility to deal with whole policy fields in an encompassing way (Goetschy, 2003). On the one hand, the OMC defines the common outcomes or objectives in a given policy area. On the other hand, the OMC is an instrument for identifying best policy practices, using the diversity of policy approaches in European countries as a "grand" reservoir of inspiration for possible policy actions for achieving the agreed objectives or outcomes.

What the heads of state foresaw in Lisbon was a concerted effort in a number of policy domains guided by the OMC. Based on guidelines, specific timetables, a battery of indicators and benchmarks and the organisation of mutual learning processes, the Union, overseen by the heads of state, could move towards the ambitious target of becoming the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world.

To ensure "more coherent strategic direction and effective monitoring of progress", the European Council announced that "a meeting of the European Council to be held every spring will define the relevant mandates and ensure that they are followed up" (Lisbon Conclusions, 2000, par. 7). Therefore, a characteristic of the OMC is that the European Council guides its implementation through its spring meetings.

A European dimension in education: defining common objectives and key issues

In fact, in line with the above mentioned role of the European Council, the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination in the area of education and training has required several steps, each approved by the European Council[7].

First, ministers of education had to agree to the common overall objectives of the education systems in Europe. This was achieved by the report "The concrete future objectives of education systems[8]", where

[7] For an overview of the current situation of OMCs in different policy fields, please see Caroline de la Porte and Philippe Pochet "The OMC intertwined with the debates on governance, democracy and social Europe" April 2003.
[8] Report from the Education Council to the European Council 14 February 2001.

ministers of education agreed to three common overarching objectives of education systems in Europe, namely:

- increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union
- facilitating the access of all to the education and training systems
- opening up education and training systems to the wider world.

These three overarching objectives were spelled out in thirteen sub-objectives giving "flesh" to the common concerns of education ministers.

The concrete future objectives of education and training systems

Adopted by the Education Council, 12 February, 2001, and transmitted to the Stockholm Summit

Objective 1: Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU
- Improving education and training for teachers and trainers.
- Developing skills for the knowledge society:
- Ensuring access to ICTs for everyone:
- Increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical studies.
- Making the best use of resources.

Objective 2: Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems
- Open learning environment
- Making learning more attractive
- Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion

Objective 3: Opening up education and training systems to the wider world
- Strengthening links with working life and research and society at large
- Developing the spirit of enterprise
- Improving foreign language learning
- Increasing mobility and exchanges
- Strengthening European cooperation

In Stockholm in 2001, at the first follow-up meeting of the European Council, after deciding on the Lisbon strategy in 2000, the European

Council approved *"the concrete future objectives of education and training systems"* (see box above) and requested a Detailed Work Programme presented as a joint report from ministers of education and the Commission. This Detailed Work Programme, which was requested for the European Council meeting of 2002 should *"include an assessment of their achievement in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination and in a worldwide perspective"* (Stockholm, European Council, 22 and 24 March 2001).

On the basis of a proposal from the European Commission, the Council (ministers of education) and the Commission jointly adopted a Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training system (Detailed Work Programme, 2002). This programme identified a number of key issues for each of the thirteen sub-objectives. Moreover, it suggested a timetable for its implementation, proposed an indicative list of indicators for measuring progress and outlined an indicative list of themes for exchanging experience, good practice and, as appropriate, peer reviews.

The Detailed Work Programme is the framework for setting up the OMC in the area of education and training. It does not precisely follow the "recipe" recommended in Lisbon, but as suggested by Vandenbroucke *"Open coordination is not some kind of fixed recipe that can be applied to whichever issue.... [it] is a kind of cookbook that contains various recipes, lighter and heavier ones"* (Vandenbroucke, 2001).

In Barcelona in 2002, the European Council approved this Detailed Work Programme. In addition, the European Council set a number of new benchmarks and guidelines. For instance, it set the objective of making *"these education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010"*. Furthermore, it called for further action in a number of fields including *"to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age: establishment of a linguistic competence indicator in 2003"* (Barcelona Conclusions, 2002, par 44). Finally, it invited the Commission to report to the Spring European Council in 2004 on the effective implementation of the Detailed Work Programme.

Implementing the OMC – first step: agreeing to European benchmarks in the area of education and training

After the adoption of the Detailed Work Programme and the subsequent endorsement at the European Council meeting in Barcelona, the Commission took an additional step in implementing the OMC in the area of education and training.

In the Communication "European benchmarks in education and training: follow-up to the Lisbon European Council" the Commission proposed five European benchmarks and invited the Council to adopt these benchmarks by May 2003. These five areas were:

- early school leavers
- graduates in mathematics, science and technology
- population having completed upper secondary education
- key competencies
- lifelong learning.

It is interesting to analyse the Council conclusion text adopted by the Council on 5 May 2003[9] and compare it to the original Commission proposal.

First, it is intriguing that "reference levels of European average performance" has replaced the word "European benchmark" in the Council conclusion text. This is not just a question of semantics. The Council has clearly wanted to stress that this is a European process and not a process where individual countries are put to the test. European cooperation should therefore be based on "European average performance" and not on concrete national targets. Moreover, the Council has underlined, in the conclusion, that "reference levels of European Average Performance" should *not define national targets[10]*. And to make it completely clear, the Council stressed that *"reference levels of European average performance do not prescribe decisions to be taken by national governments, however national actions based on national priorities will contribute to their achievement"*.

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[9] Please see annex for the Council Conclusions of 5 May 2003 - Official Journal of the European Union C 134/4 (7.6.2003).

[10] Phrases in italic indicate that the wording is taken from: Council conclusions on Reference levels of European Average Performance in Education and Training- please see annex.

This is fully in line with article 149 of the treaty according to which the community shall contribute to the development of quality education, while fully respecting the responsibility of the member states for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

Secondly, the Council has reaffirmed that this is *a first list of indicators and reference levels of European average performance.* Thereby implicitly suggesting that other reference levels will follow these first five and confirming that reference levels at European level is an indispensable part of the OMC.

Thirdly, the Council stressed that data used for setting reference levels of average European performance *should be based on data that are comparable* (i.e. valid, comparable, up to date). This clearly reflects that the Council also in a longer-term perspective wants indicators of relevance for the areas where it sets reference levels of average European performance.

Finally, the Council in a sense contradicted itself in the text, when it stressed that reference level of average European performance should be set *while taking into account the starting point of the individual member states.* This reintroduced the focus on individual member states, which was avoided by using the term reference levels of European average performance.

When comparing the actual benchmarks adopted by the Council with the benchmarks proposed by the Commission, there are a number of important differences. In fact, the Council changed the wording of four of the five benchmarks proposed by the Commission.

The benchmark on *early school leavers* appears to have been the least controversial one proposed by the Commission.

Commission proposal	Reference level of European average performance as adopted by the Council
By 2010, all member states should at least halve the rate of early school leavers, with reference to the rate recorded in the year 2000, in order to achieve an EU-average rate of 10% or less.	By 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers should be achieved.

The goal of halving the number of early school leavers had already been suggested by the European Council in Lisbon. Therefore, the Council naturally gave full backing to formalising the benchmark of achieving a EU average rate of no more than 10% early school leavers i.e. approximately halving the level of 19.4% in the year 2000.

Analysing the Commission proposal on *math/science and technology graduates,* it is clear that the Council found the total number of graduates the politically most important issue rather than the gender imbalance.

Commission proposal	Reference level of European average performance as adopted by the Council
By 2010, member states will have at least halved the level of gender imbalance among graduates in mathematics, science, technology whilst securing an overall significant increase of the total number of graduates, compared to the year 2000.	The total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology in the European Union should increase by at least 15% by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease.

Therefore, the benchmark proposed by the Commission was "turned around" giving added weight to the total number of graduates where an increase of 15% was adopted. However, the reference level of average European performance adopted by the Council also calls for a decrease in the gender imbalance.

The benchmark proposed by the Commission on *completion of upper secondary education* considered the population aged 25-64 years old.

Commission proposal	Reference level of European average performance as adopted by the Council
By 2010, member states should ensure that the average percentage of 25-64 year-olds in the EU with at least upper secondary education reaches 80% or more.	By 2010, at least 85% of 22 year-olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education.

Current EU average was 65.7% (2000) for 25-64 year-olds. However, it appears that the Council has preferred a target which might be easier to achieve, and to which the Council can readily contribute. A reference point of 22 years old was adopted giving member states a clear target within the framework of the Lisbon strategy, which runs until 2010.

In the area of *basic skills,* the Council lowered the Commission proposal and took out reference to mathematical and scientific literacy.

Commission proposal	Reference level of European average performance as adopted by the Council
By 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15 year-olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy will be at least halved in each Member State.	By 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15 year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000.

Deleting references to scientific and mathematical literacy appears appropriate, since the data produced by the OECD (PISA-study) in these two areas are not yet adequate for measuring low-achievers in these two areas. In conclusion, the Council adopted a reference level of European average performance focussing on only reading literacy calling for a 20% decrease in low-achieving 15 year-olds instead of 50% as suggested by the Commission.

Finally when discussing the benchmark on *lifelong learning*, the Council removed the reference to a national benchmark, which was included in the original Commission proposal (i.e. in no country should the participation in lifelong learning be lower than 10%). This ran counter to the decision to focus on European average performance (see discussion

above), and the reference to individual member states was therefore deleted.

Commission proposal	Reference level of European average performance as adopted by the Council
By 2010, the EU-average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 15% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group) and in no country should it be lower than 10%.	By 2010, the European Union average level of participation in lifelong learning, should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group).

Moreover, a footnote in the conclusion text makes reference to the fact that a Eurostat taskforce is currently undertaking work on a new Adult Education Survey that would yield a better measure of participation. Thereby, it is implicitly recognising that the Labour Force Survey currently used for measuring lifelong learning does not give a very good picture of participation. The reason is that the reference period of participation in education and training is too short, namely only four weeks prior to the survey.

What is the role of indicators and benchmarks in the Open Method of Coordination?

In the OMC principally two roles are foreseen for indicators and benchmarks, namely as a measurement tool and as a means for the exchange of best practice.

Indicators for measuring progress
It is clear from the Lisbon conclusions and subsequent European Council conclusions that indicators and benchmarks occupy a central role in the OMC.

The stated ambition of becoming the most dynamic knowledge based economy in the world could become hallow if it did not entail measurable policy actions in areas of relevance for the overall ambition. Therefore, ambitious guidelines and benchmarks were needed to break down the overall ambition in achievable goals in different policy areas.

As mentioned, the European Council in Lisbon, Stockholm and Barcelona already provided a first sketch of required guidelines and benchmarks for fulfilling the ambition. The Council (including in its formation of education ministers) has since amended this list of guidelines and benchmarks in an ongoing process of finding relevant reference points for realising the overall Lisbon ambition.

The policy push for using indicators and benchmarks in the area of education and training is very clear and extraordinary from a historic perspective. The Detailed Work Programme provides an indicative list of 33 indicators and a standard format to be used for measuring progress within the thirteen objective areas, namely:

Model to be used for monitoring progress regarding education and training within the Open Method of Coordination.

	Present levels			Progress		Benchmarks for	
Indicator	Average (EU)	Average of 3 best performing EU	USA and Japan	2004	2010	2004	2010

In addition, the work programme outlines how progress in education and training will be monitored and measured: *"On the basis of chosen indicators for each objective an interim report foreseen in 2004 and the final report foreseen in 2010 will include an evaluation of progress made. Where feasible, European-wide benchmarks could be set by the Council by consensus within the scope of articles 149 and 150."*

Therefore, indicators are used for measuring progress in all objective areas and towards the common benchmarks in areas where these have been adopted (like the five areas mentioned above). Benchmarks function as reference points for where the European Union should be in 2004 and in 2010. They point to areas where policy efforts are necessary.

Moreover as the table clearly suggests comparisons should be made to performance in the US and Japan i.e. the countries that are considered the main "competitors" in realising the ambition of becoming the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.

Indicators as a mean for the exchange of best policy practice

However, it was never the intention that indicators should be considered only in their capacity for measuring progress. Indicators could also function as a standard for judging best practice. Or as a starting point for a dialogue between member states on reasons for differences in performance.

In a sense, indicators function as "tin openers" providing a starting point for policy discussion laying like the meat in the tin. Indicators invite questions. Why is country X performing better than country Y? How come system X is more equitable than system Y? What are the factors behind good performance? Questions like these should allow member states to identify elements of successful policy practice and allow them to learn from each other. Therefore, indicators can be used as an instrument for stimulating the exchange of good experiences and new ways of thinking about policy approaches.

Using indicators as a vehicle for the exchange of best practice within the European Union is even more relevant when considering that a number of member states are actually showing world best performances in a number of objective areas.

This should imply the opportunity for using benchmarking (i.e. comparing country performance according to indicators) as a tool for initiating dialogue and learning processes among policymakers and the education community. Benchmarking is a learning process, which requires trust, understanding, selecting and adapting good practices in order to improve. This is not a process leading to improvements overnight. However, the OMC is conceived as an instrument that initiates a continuous process of learning and improvement.

To underpin the learning aspects of the OMC in the areas of education and training, the Commission is setting up the structures that should allow member states to draw benefit from experiences in other European countries. Eight different working groups have been set up for the identification of best policy practice in the thirteen objective areas of the Detailed Work Programme. These groups work in close cooperation with a Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, which has the task of giving advice to the Commission regarding relevant indicators for measuring progress towards the thirteen objectives.

The interim report requested by the Barcelona European Council for 2004 will include examples of best policy practices in member states analysed by these eight working groups. These examples should provide an inventory of best policy practice, which can help member states to progressively develop their own policies, thereby achieving greater convergence towards the three main strategic objectives of education and training in the EU.

Summing up

This chapter has provided a short overview of the establishment of a new policy paradigm at European level in the area of education and training. After an initial period, where the focus was mainly cooperation programmes in education and training, the European Council in Lisbon gave fresh impetus to the development of a coherent policy in the areas of education and training at European level. The Lisbon conclusions provided the strategic goal and the instrument to achieve it: the Open Method of Coordination.

By adopting the Detailed Work Programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, ministers of education have established the framework for the Open Method of Coordination to play its full role.
In addition, by adopting an initial list of five reference levels of European average performance, ministers underlined the willingness of member states to engage fully in the Open Method of Coordination. Moreover, they indicated which areas they considered of primary importance in contributing to the Lisbon strategy.

It remains to be seen whether the exchange of experiences and best practices will allow member states to move together in the direction of the common goals and reference levels of average European performance. This depends also on the commitment and conviction of member states in implementing these common goals through the exchange of good experiences and new ways of thinking about policy approaches.

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Annex

Official Journal of the European Union

COUNCIL

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
of 5 May 2003
on reference levels of European average performance in education and
training (Benchmarks)
(2003/C 134/02)

THE COUNCIL,

Having regard to:

1. The Lisbon European Council's affirmation that Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment.

2. The mandate from the Lisbon European Council to the Education Council 'to undertake a general reflection on 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' (Presidency Conclusions, No 27).

3. The Report on the concrete future objectives of the education and training systems[1], which included 3 concrete strategic objectives together with 13 associated objectives, and the detailed work programme[2], which was endorsed by the Barcelona European Council of 15 to 16 March 2002.

4. The European Council of 20 and 21 March 2003 which called for 'using benchmarks to identify best practice and to ensure efficient and effective investment in human resources'.

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[1] Report from the Education Council to the European Council adopted by the Education Council on 12 February 2001.

[2] 'Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe' jointly adopted by the Council and Commission on 14 February 2002 (OJ C 142, 14.6.2002).

5.   The open method of coordination, which is described in the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council as a 'means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals'. The open method of coordination is implemented through the use of tools such as indicators and benchmarks as well as the exchange of experiences peer reviews and the dissemination of good practice.

6.   The Communication from the Commission 'European benchmarks in education and training: follow-up to the Lisbon European Council' COM(2002) 629,

REAFFIRMS

That the report to be submitted to the Spring European Summit in 2004 should:

—   emphasise the need for a concerted and continuous effort in following up on the Lisbon goals of making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world,

—   recognise the central role of indicators and reference levels in giving directions and measuring progress towards the thirteen objectives in the objective report,

—   propose a first list of indicators and reference levels of European average performance to be applied for monitoring the progress in the field of education and training towards the Lisbon goals;

STRESSES

In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the Council has agreed to establish a series of reference levels of European average performance, while taking into account the starting point of the individual Member States which will be used as one of the tools for monitoring the implementation of the 'Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe'. Reference levels of European[3] average performance:

—   should be based on data that are comparable,

—   do not define national targets,

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[3]   Based on EU and acceding countries.

— do not prescribe decisions to be taken by national governments, however national actions based on national priorities will contribute to their achievement;

Early school leavers

A minimum knowledge base is required in order to take part in today's knowledge based society. Those without qualifications are consequently less likely to participate effectively in lifelong learning and are in danger of being left by the wayside in today's increasingly competitive societies. Hence, diminishing the percentage of early school leavers is essential to ensure full employment and greater social cohesion.

— Therefore, by 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10 % early school leavers[1] should be achieved;

Mathematics, science and technology
The European Union needs an adequate output of scientific specialists in order to become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. The need for more scientific specialists is underlined by the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council (2002) 'that overall spending on R & D and innovation in the Union should be increased with the aim of approaching 3 % of GDP by 2010'.

Gender balance is an especially important challenge in this area. Relatively fewer women than men choose to pursue degrees in mathematics, science and technology and even fewer women choose careers in research.

— Therefore, the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology[2] in the European Union should increase by at least 15 % by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease;

Completion of upper secondary education

Completing upper secondary education is increasingly important not just for successful entry into the labour market, but also to allow students access to the learning and training opportunities offered by higher education. Successful participation in the knowledge-based society requires the basic building blocks offered by a secondary education.

[1] Share of the population aged 18 to 24 with only lower secondary education or less and not in education or training (structural indicator) — Source Eurostat; Labour Force Survey.
[2] Total number of tertiary (ISCED levels 5 and 6) graduates from the Mathematics, Science and Technology fields — source joint UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat questionnaire.

—   Therefore, by 2010, at least 85 % of 22 year olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education([3]);

Basic skills

All individuals need a core package of knowledge, skills and attitudes for employment, inclusion, subsequent learning as well as personal fulfilment and development.

—   Therefore, by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15 years old in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20 % compared to the year 2000([4]);

Lifelong learning

In a knowledge society individuals must update and complement their knowledge, competencies and skills throughout life to maximise their personal development and to maintain and improve their position in the labour market.

—   Therefore, by 2010, the European Union average level of participation in Lifelong Learning, should be at least 12,5 % of the adult working age population (25 to 64 age group)([5]);

Investment in human resources

Investment in education is one with long-term returns and indirect as well as direct benefits, and most governments consider it to impact positively on several key political challenges such as social cohesion, international competition, and sustainable growth.

The Lisbon European Summit called for a 'substantial annual increase in the per capita investment in human resources'. In the Communication 'Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe', the European Commission proposes a number of issues of relevance for the efficient investment in education and training that should be analysed in detail. The Council is looking forward to the outcome of ongoing work before deciding on further action.

([3])   Percentage of those aged 22 who have successfully completed at least upper secondary education (ISCED 3) — Source Eurostat Labour Force Survey.
([4])   Reading literacy proficiency 'level 1' and lower — Source PISA (OECD 2000).
([5])   Percentage of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training in four weeks prior to the survey –Source Eurostat; Labour Force Survey. A Eurostat taskforce is currently undertaking work on a new Adult Education Survey that would yield a better measure of participation.

The Detailed Work Programme: experiences and reflections of four working groups

Bart Maes, Gaston Moens, Nicole Raes, Chris Van Woensel

Introduction

From the second half of 2001 onwards, eight working groups gradually started on the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme. This article draws on experiences, interim reports, minutes and other documents released by the European Council and the Commission of four working groups:

- maths, science and technology
- basic skills
- the basic skills subgroup on languages
- the group on open learning environment, active citizenship, equal opportunities and social inclusion.

This article tries to combine the perspectives of members of these four working groups. It contains three parts, the first is a brief description of the context of the objectives process and in general terms, the composition, mandate and planning of the working groups. The second part goes more into detail and takes the expert group on languages as a concrete example. It gives a more or less full description of the scope of work accomplished so far in this group. Some general reflections on the process are given in the third and last part.

What is written here is a snapshot in time, it describes and reflects on the proceedings in these four working groups before the 2003 summer recess and is, by definition, premature as to the criticism, reflections and comments given.

The objectives

The concrete future objectives are:

Strategic objective 1
Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU, in the light of the new requirements of the knowledge society and the changing patterns of teaching and learning:

Objective 1.1   Improving education and training for teachers and trainers
Objective 1.2   Developing skills for the knowledge society
Objective 1.3   Ensuring access to ICT for everyone
Objective 1.4   Increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical studies
Objective 1.5   Making the best use of resources.

Strategic objective 2
Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems, in the light of the guiding principle of lifelong learning, fostering employability and career development as well as active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion:

Objective 2.1   Creating an open learning environment
Objective 2.2   Making learning more attractive
Objective 2.3   Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion.

Strategic objective 3
Opening up education and training systems to the wider world, in the light of the fundamental need to foster relevance to work and society and to meet challenges resulting form globalisation:

Objective 3.1   Strengthening the links with working life and research, and society at large
Objective 3.2   Developing the spirit of enterprise
Objective 3.3   Improving foreign language learning
Objective 3.4   Increasing mobility and exchange
Objective 3.5   Strengthening European cooperation.

The working groups, their mandates and planning

The working groups
The working groups consist of experts who are designated by the member and accession states, by different European stakeholders. These experts come from a broad range of institutions and a great variety of expertise fields. Their role is to advise the Commission on the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination and more specifically on how key issues should be formulated and how the instruments of the Open Method of Coordination could be applied for their area. These instruments are:
- indicators, i.e. data which can be monitored over time as an indication of progress in the policy area involved
- benchmarks, i.e. concrete quantitative or qualitative targets, for a certain year or period in either absolute or relative figures
- exchange of good practice between member states from which lessons can be drawn for future policy development
- peer review, which involves member states submitting measures to review by other member states.

The mandate
From the beginning it was clearly stated that the working groups were to be engaged in a political exercise for the ministers and the heads of state. The basic question would be asked in different stages and for different issues: within the frameworks of the Detailed Work Programme and of the open coordination method, what do we want our ministers to do? This sets the mandate of the working groups: established and coordinated by the European Commission they are expected to give expert and scientifically argued advice to the policy-makers. They clearly work within the context of political decision-making that has already been made.

In doing so, the working groups have to keep in mind and liaise with parallel policy development at different levels. For instance, for working group G (open learning environment, active citizenship, equal opportunities and social inclusion) these are: lifelong learning, lifelong guidance, more generally the "Bruges" process, mobility and skills, the European Year of Persons with Disabilities, the Bologna process, and so on. All these studies, communications, programmes and activities are supposed to be coordinated and to provide input into the objectives exercise.

Planning
The working groups follow a common three-stage work sequence.

Stage 1
1. definition of concepts
2. mapping exercise of achievements to date related to education and training; and in related initiatives in other fields
3. identification of themes for exchange of good practice and peer review
4. formulation of priorities relating to indicators and benchmarks
5. drawing up interim reports.

Stage 2
6. analysis of good practice
7. proposals for peer review
8. identification of critical success/failure factors.

Stage 3
9. discussion and validation of outside expertise work
10. drawing up of policy recommendations
11. adoption of final report for the Commission.

The expert group on languages

Key issues and indicators
The Detailed Work Programme identified two key issues under objective 3.3, "Improving foreign language learning":
- encouraging everyone to learn two or, where appropriate, more languages in addition to their mother tongue, and increasing awareness of the importance of foreign language learning at all ages;

and
- encouraging schools and training institutions in using efficient teaching and training methods and motivating continuation of language learning at a later stage of life.

To measure progress in these directions, two possible indicators were proposed:
26) percentage of pupils and students who reach a level of proficiency in two foreign languages (for instance, to level B2 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference)

and
27) percentage of language teachers having participated in initial training or in-service training courses involving mobility providing direct contact with the language/culture they teach.

In setting these indicators, the Council and the Commission observed that "*no reliable data on the foreign language skills of young people are available; further work must therefore be carried out to obtain them.*"[1]
The Barcelona European Council of March 2002 welcomed the agreement reached on the Detailed Work Programme and called for further action aimed, inter alia, at improving "*the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age*", including through the "*establishment of a linguistic competence indicator in 2003.*"[2]
On the occasion of the debate in the Education Council on the communication on European benchmarks for education and training (5-6 May 2003), several member states reiterated the urgent need to establish benchmarks also in the domain of foreign languages.

The discussion in and tasks of the expert group on languages

In July 2002[3] an expert group on languages was set up by the European Commission in the framework of the Objectives Process and within the specific method used to attain the languages objective, i.e. "the Open Method of Coordination".
As a subgroup of the basic skills group, the expert group on languages is somewhat atypical. The various members have diverse backgrounds: some work for ministries (their functions vary from general pedagogical advisors to directors of international relations units), some are inspectors, others are trainers or teachers in higher education or lecturers at universities in faculties of psychology or philosophy, still others function within pedagogical institutes or have responsibilities in cabinets.

The mandate of this group includes
A. discussing possible indicators and the targets to be met (benchmarks, now referred to as reference levels of European average performance in education and training) for language learning in general and in particular an indicator concerning foreign language competence, as requested by the Barcelona European Council (discussing the instruments to reach the objectives),
as well as

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[1] Cf. http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/keydoc/2002/progobj_en.pdf
[2] Cf. http://ue.eu.int/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf
[3] In November 2002, the Experts Language Group was enlarged to the candidate countries.

B. further identifying themes for the exchange of *good practices* and organising the exchange of them and peer reviews (identifying instruments to reach the objectives)

and

C. providing advice on the formulation of the *Action Plan* on promoting linguistic diversity and language learning.

The Objectives Process (A + B) concerns actions at the national level on language teaching and learning, focusing by definition on the education and training systems of participating countries.
The Action Plan (C) concerns principally actions at Community level and relates to issues of linguistic diversity as well as language teaching and learning.

As far as deadlines are concerned, an intermediate report will have to be provided (by all working groups) to the education ministers in the autumn of 2003 and to the Spring European Council of 2004. The expert group on languages was to produce examples of good practice by the end of February 2003; the accompanying policy recommendations were due for mid May 2003. The Action Plan was planned for the first half of 2003, which succeeded. Its presentation was scheduled for the summer of 2003 and it will probably be implemented through the Commission's existing programmes and activities, in close coordination with the objectives process.
The calendar and focus of the group have also largely been influenced by the linguistic competence indicator, because the European Council of Barcelona had asked for it to be ready by the end of 2003.

Indicators and benchmarks
For this topic there is interference with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB)[4], and with the European unit of Eurydice that presents some data that could usefully integrate the work on indicators. By the time of publication of this article the expert group on languages will have considered both the indicator of linguistic competence requested by the Barcelona European Council, and the indicators required for the Objectives Process itself. In addition to the two indicators included in the indicative list of the Detailed Work Programme, the group

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[4] The SGIB defines "how" things should be measured; the expert group on languages defines "what" should be measured.

will also have discussed other possible indicators, concerning early language learning and adult language learning.

In May 2003 the conclusions of the expert group concerning the use of indicators for measuring progress in the field of foreign language learning were the following:

A. The indicator of linguistic competence ("Barcelona" indicator)

The Detailed Work Programme

This indicator broadly corresponds to the first indicator proposed in the Detailed Work Programme. The explicit request of the European Council makes it clear that the purpose of this indicator is to measure progress towards the objective that all European citizens should be able to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue.

The proposal of the SGIB

The SGIB had proposed the following two indicators to replace the original formulation of the Detailed Work Programme (percentage of pupils and students who reach a level of proficiency in two foreign languages):

3.3.A   distribution of lower/upper secondary pupils learning foreign languages;

3.3.B   average number of foreign languages learned per pupil in upper secondary education.

For both these indicators harmonised data are available through Eurostat. The SGIB added two "general remarks" to its proposal:

- The area is relevant but difficult to manage. It might be useful to start out with basic statistics on the number of foreign languages taught in primary and secondary education, bearing in mind that length of study and number of languages studied has very little to do with quality and intensity.
- Results of a European study comparing proficiency levels in English as a foreign language will soon be available for eight EU countries. The Euro Student Report (2000) should also be taken into account as it gives information on proficiency levels based on student self-assessment based on eight countries.

Statistics on numbers of languages taught do not meet the requirement laid down by the Barcelona Council; at the best, they would indicate what languages are taught, but they would not describe the practical language skills that result from this teaching.

In fact, though the Euro Student survey does include data on student language proficiency, degree of language proficiency and effect of language proficiency on international student mobility, these data are not reliable (proficiency levels are well above 95% in most countries for the first foreign language and in some of them also for the second!). In addition, it is based on a self-assessment of the students surveyed, and therefore of little use for the purpose of the objectives process; even the more reliable Eurobarometer data for this purpose have already been rejected.

The expert group on languages therefore concluded that the two indicators proposed by the SGIB are certainly useful and can help to monitor the two key aspects of language teaching and linguistic diversity. At the same time, they say nothing about the level of competence reached by the pupils/students, and do not answer to the requests of the Detailed Work Programme and of the Barcelona European Council.

The proposals of the expert group on languages
The expert group on languages put forward the following description of the indicator of linguistic competence. It should:

- measure the linguistic competence of young people at the end of compulsory education, the objective being assessing the efficiency of educational systems in equipping the students with the required skills. Notes for the interpretation of data should of course take into account that this would mean a student population of different ages
- measure pupils' skills in (at least) two languages (other than mother tongue/"principal language"), (they need not be mastered to the same level)
- assess all four competencies (reading, listening, speaking and writing), because to do otherwise might give the wrongful impression that (for example) oral production was less important than other skills
- be based on the scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The group stressed the importance of the political choice underlined in the mandate received from the Council: the indicator should measure different skills in different languages.

The indicator needs to be fed with data. These data need to be collected from test results. An external consultant – Professor Anne West from the London School of Economics – had therefore been charged to conduct a study of the systems developed by ALTE, DIALANG, PISA and the

methodology proposed by Gerard Bonnet. Each of these systems has strengths and weaknesses.

The consultant's opinion, accepted by the expert group on languages, was that the best way forward would then be the construction of a new test, drawing where possible on the work of all the above organisations. This would be a high-profile test. To be fully credible in its design and administration, it would require careful preparation and in-depth training of testers. Tests of oral skills might take longer to develop than tests of other skills.

To proceed towards the establishment of the linguistic competence indicator, the Commission should then:

- launch a call for the design of new tests (or adaptation of existing tests)
- launch a call for the organisation and delivery of the tests or negotiate to use existing structures
- establish a political structure to oversee the whole exercise.

It was mentioned that before proceeding, however, the financial, technical and political aspects of such a test should be thoroughly examined. The expert group on languages would appreciate the opinion of the SGIB.

B. The indicator measuring the percentage of language teachers in training abroad (percentage of language teachers having participated in initial training or in-service training courses involving mobility providing direct contact with the language/ culture they teach).

The SGIB recommended *"to drop this indicator area"*, which *"was not considered a workable one"*. Difficulties were identified mainly in relation with definitions and possible comparability of data. At the same time, the SGIB was ready to consider inputs from the working groups on "teachers and trainers", "mobility" and "languages".

The expert group on languages is aware that participation in training abroad is just one possible dimension of the "efficient teaching and training methods" to be encouraged. Ideally, an indicator of outcome, such as quality of teaching, would of course be preferable to an indicator of input, such as training. However, a first-hand knowledge of the culture linked to the language taught is an essential complement of good language skills and pedagogical skills (which are assessed by the national qualification systems). Focusing on this aspect could signal the

importance that the expert group attaches to the cultural element of language learning.

The group stressed the importance of coordination with the expert group on Improving the Education of Teachers and Trainers.

C. *A possible indicator measuring the participation of adults in language learning*

Both key issues mentioned in the Detailed Work Programme in relation to languages insist on the importance of promoting lifelong learning of languages, by *"increasing awareness of the importance of foreign language learning at all ages"* and by *"motivating continuation of language learning at a later stage of life"*.
It was therefore proposed to develop an indicator for measuring the language learning opportunities available to adults, in the private and public sector. Such an indicator should give an idea of which learning opportunities are available to adults, and to how many adults in a given country. It seems however unlikely that reliable and comparable data can be collected, especially in the light of the many different sources of continuing, informal and non formal education available (in the workplace or elsewhere; through private lessons or classes in official language schools or simply through informal conversations; using TV, the Internet, CDs, tapes and videos or books...). This area, therefore, could lend itself more to an exchange of good practice.

As an alternative, some experts proposed measuring the percentage of adults engaged in language learning. This could only be a rough measure and would present problems of definition, but might give a general idea of the different baselines in different countries. In particular, it would be interesting combining data on adults engaged in language learning and data on their formal education. The data could possibly be collected in the framework of the survey being prepared on lifelong learning.

D. *A possible indicator measuring the dimension of early language learning*

Several experts in the group suggested developing an indicator focusing on the important dimension of early language learning. Such an indicator could complement the data available through Eurydice (starting age of compulsory language teaching, duration of compulsory language

teaching, number of foreign languages studied...), possibly taking into account the key aspects of awareness and motivation.

E. To conclude

The SGIB was therefore invited to give its technical opinion on the linguistic competence indicator as outlined in paragraph A. and to produce recommendations on the proposed indicators on teacher training, early language learning and adult learning.

This opinion came after the meeting of 5 and 6 June 2003. During this meeting the SGIB discussed a.o. the note on indicators from the expert group on languages. In connection with the linguistic competence indicator, G. Bonnet, the French expert, stated that the testing of all skills, and this for a great many languages, is a necessity indeed, yet that the practice to do so right from the very beginning, might be too ambitious.
J. van Rijn, the Dutch expert, referred to the work presently being done in the Netherlands in connection with the development of a European item bank for language testing. He also pointed out the importance of the different testing cultures.
The SGIB agreed upon the fact that further work should be carried out in analysing the financial implications – at European as well as at national/regional level - of the development and implementation of the Barcelona indicator. According to the SGIB efforts must be put into working towards synergy and avoidance of overlap with the Dutch initiative and other projects. Political agreement and adequate budget must be sought before developing such an indicator. Ways and means of working together with PISA must further be analysed.
With respect to the possible indicator for the language provisions for adults, Slovenia noted to have such data available. The Eurostat representative announced the existence of a recent study, done by the London School of Economics, for the European Commission, about the availability of data about foreign language learning in professional education and training.
For the other possible indicators the message was that the SGIB would study the suggestions, of all working groups, that indicators for other possible domains should be developed in the second part of its mandate.

Examples of good practice/the Action Plan

Good practice
The Detailed Work Programme had already proposed three themes for exchanging experience and, as appropriate, peer review:
- methods and ways of organising the teaching of languages
- early language learning
- ways of promoting the learning of foreign languages.

The themes finally selected by the working group were then: early language learning, secondary education, linguistic diversity in the educational systems, lifelong language learning, and training of teachers of foreign languages. In October 2002 the members of the working group were asked to start selecting examples of good practice from their countries.

Later, clear criteria were set for selecting the examples of good practice. Of course, they should have to do with the themes mentioned, but each example should lend itself to extract policy recommendations from it. Furthermore it was important for each example to be user-friendly, to appeal to participants and to be adaptable and transferable.

The end of February 2003 was the deadline for submitting examples of good practice. In the meantime Professor Baetens–Beardsmore, an external expert, was appointed to analyse the examples of good practice. By mid May each member of the group was to send in policy recommendations along the lines of the examples of good practice given earlier.

It was the intention to organise study visits to the countries of which the expert selected examples of good practice. The examples must be examined in order to extract the implicit philosophy and verify that they can be applied in other, often very different situations. Eventually, the common denominator ensuring the success of such practice must be translated into concrete and realistic policy recommendations.

Finally, the expert language group's recommendations will go to the education ministers. The group's report should help them to formulate better or more effective policies.

The Action Plan
For the *Action Plan* the European Commission forwarded a reflection document, drafted by the Commission services, to the members of the expert group on languages. They were the first to reflect on it. This discussion document formed the basis for a broad consultation later on. Comments of stakeholders and interested parties led to the formulation of

the "Action Plan on Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity".
In December 2002 the announced larger consultation round started; the document, "Consultation note on the Promotion of Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity" was published on the website of the EC; every citizen interested in the matter could react to it.
In January 2003 the various ministries were asked to reflect on the note. The experts had also been asked to indicate the names of representative organisations working at national level in the fields of education and languages (associations of teachers, students, parents etc.) to whom the consultation document should be sent.
The examination of the responses from ministries to the questions raised in the consultation document showed their overall support for the availability of lessons in a wide range of languages, multilingual comprehension, content and language integrated learning, a greater transparency of language certification and the implementation of national language audits with a view to defining national language policies. Language teachers are seen as key figures and the quality of their training is considered very important.
In April 2003 a stakeholders' conference was organised.

Elements from the consultation round lead to formulating the "Action Plan on Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity".
At the moment of writing this article the Action Plan was finished; it was to be presented in the summer of 2003. It is directed towards three axes: lifelong language learning, better language teaching and a language friendly environment. In connection with the actions, those on a European level should be complementary with actions on the national/regional level. Through cooperation programmes and other forms of support (such as studies, conferences, seminars, networking, etc.), the European Commission will focus on the coordination of efforts made towards this necessity.
The Action Plan will be implemented through existing programmes and Commission activities and all this in close cooperation with the Objectives Process. It will run between January 2004 and December 2006.

The combined action of the three tasks
The promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning (Action Plan) must be seen within the framework of the implementation of the goals of and the projects resulting from the European Year of Languages. Actions which will be set up for the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning will be supported by the European Commission but should be in keeping with the future objectives of education and training

systems. The examples of good practice illustrate the themes implied within language learning and the conclusions from studying these examples may lead to EC actions.

To summarize: the output of the group's work

Indirect output

At the end of its first working year (end of June 2003), the group had worked towards input in the "Joint Interim Report", which will be largely a policy document.

The first report of the expert group on languages offers a survey (until the end of June 2003) of the activities of the group and of the difficulties encountered; where possible it adds suggestions for adapting the Detailed Work Programme (key issues, indicators, themes for the exchange of good practice). It formulates some policy recommendations. It refers to the Action Plan, to the work on indicators, especially to the work on the linguistic competence indicator, and to the results of the exchange of good practice.

Together with the abstracts of other working groups, a concise form of this report will be included in a Commission staff working paper.

The Joint Interim Report will be presented by the Commission and the Council of Education at the Spring Council (2004). It identifies what policies are working well, with a view to delivering appropriate recommendations to policy-makers. It comprises:

- an introductory text with a policy focus and messages in the thematic areas that are understandable and meaningful in the wide variety of legislative and practical contexts in which ministers have responsibilities.
- a Commission staff working paper which draws conclusions of a more detailed nature from the work undertaken in all the groups with a view to indicating the policy decisions within each of the areas that have contributed to the process of system change.

An annex to the Joint Interim Report will concern proposed indicators.

Direct output

The group plays the central role in the definition of the Action Plan on Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity that the Commission has been asked to present as a follow-up to the successful implementation of the European Year of Languages 2001.

In the framework of the Objectives Process the group helps towards specifying the instruments – indicators and benchmarks, exchanges of

good practice – available for pursuing the agreed objectives within the Open Method of Coordination. In addition to dealing with the two indicators mentioned in the Detailed Work Programme the expert group also assists the Commission services in defining the linguistic competence indicator that the Barcelona European Council specifically asked for in its conclusions.

Reflections

The experts' position
The working groups are reference groups of the European Commission and do not work under the Education Committee or Council. This gives the word "experts" a clear meaning: they are supposed to provide the Commission with their expertise knowledge and assistance. But at the same time, the experts are appointed by their country and therefore also represent the points of view and interests of that country. This puts them in a difficult double role of being an independent expert for the Commission and a country representative. During the discussions it is clear that group members take different positions in this continuum. And the fact that some countries do not always send the same people does not make that situation easier.

Overlap between working groups
Splitting up the objectives according to different working groups is inevitable. But the division is somewhat unpractical at some points. For example, there is a very strong connection between working group H, dealing with objective 2.2 (making learning more attractive) and working group G. Group H's key issues have a very strong link with Group G's objective 2.1 (creating an open learning environment). This link is stronger than Group G's internal link between objectives 2.1 (creating an open learning environment) and 2.3 (supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion). This somewhat illogical division of responsibilities causes problems in attributing content to the objectives and certainly in doing homework on policy recommendations and good practice.

Different implementation of working methods
This previous problem is strengthened by a difference in implementation of working methods and timing of the several working groups. There is lack of agreed understanding about the concrete tasks of the working groups, about the way of decision-making within the working groups,

the status of the produced documents and reports, the timing of activities and meetings, etc. Clear guidelines for the experts and for the persons chairing the meetings might bring more clarity in the entire process.

Keeping the broader perspective

The objectives exercise takes place in a much broader context of parallel policy in different areas at European level. Furthermore, the developments in other groups influence the work to a certain extent. Within the groups themselves, experts are confronted with an overload of documents in which it is difficult to see the wood for the trees. Often, these documents are sent in very shortly before the meeting. In general, it is not easy for the experts to keep the overview of developments and to put their work into the necessary broader perspective. To some extent the Commission provides help by inviting the leading people or experts of other key groups to the meetings, so they can give input about developments in their area of work.

Looking for the long-term perspective

The activities of the working groups are scheduled into three different stages. However, these stages do not sufficiently shape the longer-term perspective of the objectives exercise. The final product to which the group's activities are supposed to lead is not clear, nor to what extent and how these products are supposed to have an effect on the national educational policy. The groups seem to be on a journey without knowing their final destination and therefore experts sometimes travel in different directions. Sometimes the journey is even given a different direction during the meetings themselves, which obviously leads to confusion. It is very difficult for the working group members to estimate the impact and way of implementation of what is being decided in the groups. It is even difficult to estimate the impact of one's own proposals in this respect.

An example might illustrate this. Working group G was asked to discuss the indicators proposed by the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks. In the process it remained unclear what the status of the comments of the working group would be or even what type of proposals were expected. The result was a mixture of sharp content-related or methodological comments, wild proposals for new indicators, questions for slowing down the pace of this work, and so on. It is difficult to find any common expert point of view in this. Furthermore, these discussions take place without any context of how the progress for the proposed indicators might be measured. When we talk about output indicators, will

these be measured at school and pupil level when examinations are taken place? Or by testing samples of a certain target group within the setting of a survey? The answers to these and other questions may lead to a different point of view on selecting and applying indicators.

Internal working procedures

Different working groups show different experiences. Group G for example. The fact that this group only started in January 2002 and already needs to contribute to the interim report, makes the first phase rather hectic and at some points chaotic. For instance, during the second meeting, guidelines for presentation of good practice were presented. Two to three examples of good practice per country were asked for, based on an indicative list of priorities, which would be sent later. As a result most experts indeed delivered examples of good practice, although this was qualified during the next meeting as being "premature". Indeed, it was not yet clear what priority topics would be chosen within which good practice examples were to be worked out. This only happened to some extent during the last meeting while discussing the policy recommendations.
Another issue which makes the meetings confusing is that items which have been discussed and decided upon during one meeting, are communicated in the documents afterwards, but are taken out at the following meeting and are said to be given "an appropriate place".

Also sometimes a detour is made when taking decisions. At the beginning of the process it is not always clear that this work is supposed to lead to a certain decision. For example, the "topics" and "definitions" based on the experts' homework and presented in collated tables, were at some point used to prepare the formulation of policy recommendations, while is was not communicated that this homework was supposed to lead to such recommendations. If this had been the case, policy recommendations might have been better prepared and more to the point. This is what the group members thought. But when the draft interim report was presented during the last meeting (not distributed in advance due to lack of time), there seemed to be no policy recommendations included after all.

In the expert group on languages, the experience is rather different. The perception here is to be member of a learning organisation. This is illustrated as follows:
• The group was very well briefed on the Objectives Process (Lisbon process) and the ensuing Detailed Work Programme at the start of

the language experts group. The same goes for the newly arrived members in November. They were briefed separately.

- The group is provided with good minutes of each meeting. Members can comment and the minutes are adapted if necessary.
- Group members could push forward their ideas on the importance of setting a test assessing all skills to find data for the linguistic competence indicator.
- Group members could suggest other ways of formulating possible indicators.
- Every member can speak freely to a very patient and flexible president. Yet the president (or the European Commission) should not accept that some countries get a platform within the expert group to expose activities that can be commercialised by the country. The Netherlands e.g. were eager to present proposals from their country in the field of assessing linguistic competence.
- External experts and consultants were chosen by the Commission to inform[5] the group members and/or to assist[6] the Commission. Yet some more openness would be appreciated concerning the criteria for selecting the external experts or consultants.

Some quotations taken from the Circa interface communication (May 2003) among the members of the language group illustrate the reflections mentioned. The quotations are taken from the group members' commentary on the EC's draft note to the SGIB: *"Avec les plus cordiales salutations et mes félicitations pour ce texte riche et concis"*, *"I am satisfied that the draft is a good summary of our deliberations and conclusions"*, *"(...) the document reproduces faithfully what we have been discussing during our meetings. I am glad that it was stressed that, (...)"* and *"I have read the document and I find it well-written and well reflecting the discussions and conclusions of the group so far. I have no amendments to make at this point".*

Significance of the objectives process for Flanders

When finally deciding to set priorities in all these areas ensuing from the Lisbon process, Flanders and its policy makers will be turned into a learning organisation entity as well. Flanders will have to go through a similar process of reflection and learning which on the one hand mirrors broadly the miniature experience of its experts in the working groups

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[5] On CLIL, on Teacher Training, on Indicators, on ICT and language learning.
[6] On the linguistic indicator, for selecting the sent in examples of good practice.

and on the other hand mirrors in a smaller way the European Commission's major learning experience. Flanders like all other countries will have to make decisions, will have to make out ways of proceeding, of having discourse and of implementing. In this context, a broad scale debate on the consequences of the Lisbon process for Flemish education should not be postponed any longer.

That is the positive element of the Lisbon process. Not only does it make national/regional policy makers obviously critical towards Europe, but also towards themselves; it provides awareness of needs, it brings along dynamics, it raises the need for comparing with others and brings us together in what we know and what we do not know. The process needs not necessarily result in change, but even then it is likely to have caused necessary movement of mind and to have revealed reasons for remaining unchanged.

European coordination of national education policies from the perspective of the new member countries

Gábor Halász

On 16 April 2003, the heads of state of ten countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia) signed the Accession Treaty with the member countries of the European Union in Athens. This act opened the way for the biggest enlargement in the history of the Union. Since that day the former candidate countries have generally been referred to as "new member countries", although full membership still depends on the ratification of the Accession Treaty by the national authorities or parliaments of the member countries (expected to be achieved by mid 2004). In many areas, including education, the new member countries will find a European landscape very different from what they faced when they first started negotiations on accession. One of the new features they face in the education sector is that this is now becoming an area where the community acquires new coordination roles and develops new techniques for this role. When the negotiations started, education - in spite of the accelerated pace of integration - was still seen as one of those areas where national sovereignty was intact. The articles on education and training in the Treaty of the Union seemed to give a strong guarantee that this state of affairs would be preserved. However, by the time of accession, the harmonisation process is clearly reaching the educational sector, as well.

New European coordination of national education policies

In March 2000 the heads of state of the EU member countries decided to extend the new policy coordination technique developed a few years earlier in the employment sector to other sectors - including education. The new technique, named Open Method of Coordination (OMC) by the European Council at its special meeting in Lisbon, consists of four key elements:

- setting guidelines with specific timetables for achieving the goals
- establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks linked with the goals formulated in the guidelines
- translating the European guidelines into national and regional action strategies, and
- a community evaluation of these national strategies and measures based on the use of common indicators and benchmarks.

This technique, although not yet known as OMC before the Lisbon summit, has been tried out in the area of employment policy since the 1994 Essen European Council, and particularly since the Amsterdam Treaty and the consecutive Luxemburg and Cardiff European Councils in 1997 and 1998 (Goetschy, 1999). Now the European Council issues the common Employment Guidelines annually, the member countries prepare annual National Action Plans (NAP) in employment, which is also a report on what they achieved, and the Commission prepares a Joint Report evaluating these NAPs.

In Lisbon the heads of state adopted an ambitious strategy for acceleration leading Europe into the era of a knowledge based economy, and OMC was defined as a major instrument to achieve this strategic goal. As it was formulated in the Lisbon conclusions: *"implementing this strategy will be achieved by improving the existing processes, introducing a new Open Method of Coordination at all levels, coupled with a stronger guiding and coordinating role for the European Council to ensure more coherent strategic direction and effective monitoring of progress"* (European Council, 2000). The application of this method was envisaged in practically all the sectors that are important for social and economic progress (such as research and technological development, environment and social policy). The decision envisaged a "fully decentralised approach" which meant -among other factors- that the concrete form of OMC could be different in the different sectors. The intention to involve the candidate countries in the OMC processes appeared in a number of documents.

The term "open" in OMC deserves particular attention. According to Telo (2001) it bears several meanings.
- It means that the diversity of the national practices and competencies of the participating countries has to be respected, that is the coordination process cannot result in imposing specific models upon them. If constraints appear, this is purely symbolic: countries are confronted with their weaknesses and strengths, and with successful practices from other countries, which puts a pressure on them to

identify and correct their mistakes and follow the successful members of the community. The process they enter strongly resembles what is called benchmarking in the business world.

- Openness also means that not only governments are invited to take part in the coordination process but social partners as well.
- The whole process has to be transparent, and visible for the larger society, it cannot remain a business of national elites.
- Openness refers to the process of European integration itself. It can be a further step towards a closer union, although it can also become a substitute for real integration.

Benchmarking is a key element of OMC. This process has been imported into policy coordination from the business sector. According to Sisson et al. (2002) benchmarking started life in multinational companies as a management tool to increase competitive performance. This encompasses the simplest comparison of performance data to complex strategic exercises aiming at examining how the world's best companies are run. It can take three forms of varying complexity:

- performance benchmarking, which involves quantitative comparisons of input and/or output measures
- process benchmarking, which covers a detailed scrutiny of the efficiency of particular business processes and activities, using focus groups and surveys, plus arrangements such as quality standards accreditation
- strategic benchmarking, which involves comparing the driving forces behind successful organisations, looking at such things as leadership and the management of change to identify possible alternative strategies and ways of improving performance.

Sisson et al. quotes the former Secretary General of the European Roundtable of Industrialist who said that the Luxemburg, Cardiff and Cologne processes were *"nothing more than glorified benchmarking exercises to deal with macro-economics, employment and structural reforms respectively, all tied together in to a coherent package at Lisbon"* (p. 5.) It is particularly important to stress that what was started after Lisbon in the education sector does not mean the harmonisation of the systems of education, that is, the content of teaching or the organisation of schooling. As already emphasised, the Treaty forbids this. What happens is the harmonisation of policies directed to the systems of education. The difference between harmonising policies and harmonising systems is a fundamental one. If policy harmonisation takes place through benchmarking - that is through communication and "policy learning" - no legal objections can be made. It also has to be stressed

that in the education sector benchmarking has been related much more to the quality of the educational service than to the quality of education policy (we shall come back to this question later). However, it has to be kept in mind that improving the quality of education is only one of the major policy goals. Therefore the evaluation of the quality of education policy cannot be restricted to the evaluation of the results of quality policy. Moreover, the quality of education is something that can be improved only in the long run by measures that go beyond policy cycles. This means that the quality of education at a given time may say more about the policies of one or two past decades than about the current ones. As a consequence, the measurement of the current quality of the system cannot always be used to evaluate the quality of the current education policy.

The impetus behind harmonising national education policies

Most of the motives that lead to the need for policy harmonisation in education can be found outside the sector. There are a few internal constraints, as well, but these seem to be much weaker than the external ones. The Lisbon decision is, in fact, a marvellous example for the neo-functionalist theory of European integration: the progress of integration in one sector automatically creates the need for stronger integration in the other. Economic integration, for instance, necessarily creates the need for stronger social integration, and the growing integration in one social area triggers similar processes in other sectors. If there is a common understanding of fundamental human rights, these have to be respected in every sector of the community, including education. That is, if there is a collision between national educational traditions and common human rights, the latter should prevail. If workers have similar rights within the community, these are also valid if these workers are teachers. If free movement is accepted as a basic community right, education cannot block this by its national traditions of awarding qualifications and diplomas.

The strongest force that leads to policy harmonisation in education is, even if this sector resists this, that it is not possible to draw sharp borderlines between the different sectors. If human resources are developed within a policy of regional development, no one speaks about education policy, however, new training programmes often with general education components are created, new institutions with education and training tasks may be set up, and new general rules regulating learning

may be established. When, in the framework of labour policies, new "active measures" are taken, aiming at leading inactive persons back to the labour market through developing their general competencies and social skills, or schools are contracted by labour administrations to develop new training modules, education policy is at work here even if education ministers are not directly involved. If, in the framework of social policy, poverty is fought by distributing cheap school meals or textbooks to children of poor families, by strengthening home-school linkages or by defining education priority zones, it is not easy to make a clear distinction between social and education policies.

Those who do not follow closely what happens in the European Union outside the narrower education sector may miss the fact that the community coordination of education policies had already started before Lisbon, without the direct involvement of ministers of education. It is enough to have a look at the structural policy of the European Union and analyse the reforms achieved through this in countries like Ireland or Portugal to see that important fractions of education policy may come under community control even within the framework set by the Treaty. This is not surprising at all. Since in these countries, education and training reforms were realised in the framework of European development (structural) policy with resources coming from the taxpayers of other countries, it was natural that the community had to take a strong responsibility on how these resources were used.

The best example of how vague the borderlines between different sectors are can be found in employment policy. Since the Delors report on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment in 1993 (European Commission, 1993), not only has employment become a key element of the common European economic policy, but its nature has also changed. There was a clear shift from employment policy seen as a tool of social solidarity to one seen as that of developing human adaptability. The common European employment policy, as it emerged from the above mentioned Luxemburg and Cardiff processes, was in fact a policy to increase the adaptation potential of European people through, among others, lifelong learning. None of the four pillars of the European employment strategy - employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities - can fully be achieved without direct education and training measures.
This is one of the reasons why lifelong learning has become a major transnational goal of European employment policy. It also has to be stressed that by the late nineties the meaning of lifelong learning had

been broadened and now includes all levels and sectors of education, including even pre-school education and the development of foundation skills during initial schooling. This is how it appears in the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning put to public debate by the Commission in 2000 (European Commission, 2000), and even more in the policy document that emerged from this debate, entitled Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality (European Commission, 2001). This latter document – used as a reference point when the community evaluates the lifelong learning components of national employment policies as part of the Joint Employment Reports - formulates very specific education policy goals for initial education. For example it defines the key competencies that have to be developed through initial education, and also suggests specific pedagogical technologies that should be applied if this objective is to be achieved. The change in the nature of employment policy, particularly the growing stress on the development of human potential and adaptability through learning, has naturally created a challenge for education policy.

The first reaction of education ministers was the adoption of a decision in 1999 to keep certain policy issues permanently on the agenda of the Education Council, and the first of them was "education in employment policy". This was the so-called "rolling agenda" which can be seen as a precursor of OMC in education (Hingel, 2001).

In the year following the Lisbon summit the Education Council adopted another resolution on the role of education and training in employment-related policies which clarified the role of education ministers not only in the formulation of common European employment policy guidelines but also in the preparation of National Action Plans for Employment and their common evaluation in the Joint Employment Reports. It is in this process that the Education Directorate of the Commission created for the first time a specific report on education and training in employment policies based on the analysis of the 2000 National Action Plans for Employment (European Commission, 2001d). By this time it became clear for education ministers that if they remained aloof from the rapidly developing policy coordination process and if the education sector did not develop its own procedure for this, coordination of policies in their sectors will be done by others.

Policy coordination in the wider context of governance reform

It is not possible to think about policy coordination in education without linking it to the wider context of national, European and global governance reform. If this is not done, or if our reflection is a captive of our narrow sectoral perspective, we shall not understand what is at stake when education joins other areas in the policy coordination process. The term "governance" has been gaining a growing importance for the last decades in the western world. Looking at one of its definitions we can immediately see why this term is used more and more frequently: the reason is that it expresses our post-modern way of thinking about society and power. According to a definition quoted by Paquet, (2001) governance refers to three elements:

- how individuals and institutions (public, private and civic) manage their collective affairs
- how the diverse interests accommodate and resolve their differences
- these many actors and organisations are involved in a continuing process of formal and informal competition, cooperation and learning.

Governance in this sense means the management of collective affairs, while accepting and taking into consideration the existence of diverging interests, and also the dynamism and the openness of the process. From our perspective it is of prime importance that governance is linked to learning in this definition. In our modern (post-modern) democracies it is this openness and dynamism based on competition, cooperation and learning that increasingly characterises the governance of nations. The whole scene is characterised by the overlapping of different responsibilities, competencies and interests of various public, private and civil institutions, all of which try to assert their own interests, to adapt their behaviour to that of others and to solve various problems through cooperation or competition. It is natural that the scene becomes even more open and dynamic if we shift from the national to the European or the global level.

European governance is often described as "multilevel governance". According to Kaiser and Prange (2002) this term specifies a mechanism of governing characterized by three features:

- decision-making competencies are shared by actors at different levels (i.e. a "dynamic" dispersion of authority)

- actors and arenas are not ordered hierarchically as in traditional inter-governmental relationships (i.e. non-hierarchical institutional design)
- consensual or non-majority decision-making among states, which requires a continuous wide-ranging negotiation process (i.e. non-majority negotiation system).

The OMC itself is, in fact, an instrument of multilevel governance. It can also be seen as a specific answer to the challenges that European governance faces in our time, such as increasing global exposure, growing diversity and complexity, the widening of the political agenda or the threats to social cohesion (Monar, 2000). The new European governance is emerging in an era characterized by growing "problem interdependence": since no single actor has sufficient potential for action or enough power to solve problems alone, they have to rely on each other. The potential to create solutions promotes the willingness to come to agreements and creates incentives to cooperate (Héritier, 2001).

The growing complexity of governance makes it necessary that new and more sophisticated policy instruments be created. The White Paper of the European Commission on European Governance (European Commission, 2001a), which emerged from a long and substantial collective reflective process and which was published in 2001, places strong stress on the need to enrich the repertoire of policy instruments. In this document OMC is mentioned as an important new item of this repertoire and its application is encouraged in different areas, including education. The White Paper stresses that OMC may take different forms in different sectors. It also points to some risks of applying such a very soft, open and flexible instrument: OMC should not replace the necessary harder instruments, and it should not lead to getting round the institutions of representative democracy (see box). From the perspective of the new member countries it is important to note that this White Paper invites them to take part in the OMC process before they fully join the community.

The EU White Paper on Governance and the Open Method of Coordination

"Community action may be complemented or reinforced by the use of the so-called "Open Method of Coordination", which can already involve the applicant countries in some cases.

The Open Method of Coordination is used on a case-by-case basis. It is a way of encouraging cooperation, the exchange of best practice and agreeing common targets and guidelines for member states, sometimes backed up by national action plans as in the case of employment and social exclusion. It relies on regular monitoring of progress to meet those targets, allowing member states to compare their efforts and learn from the experience of others.

In some areas, such as employment, social policy or immigration policy, it sits alongside the programme-based and legislative approach; in others, it adds value at a European level where there is little scope for legislative solutions. This is the case, for example, with work at a European level defining future objectives for national education systems.

The Commission plays an active coordinating role already and is prepared to do so in the future, but the use of the method must not upset the institutional balance nor dilute the achievement of common objectives in the Treaty. In particular, it should not exclude the European Parliament from a European policy process. The Open Method of Coordination should be a complement to, rather than a replacement for, Community action."

(Source: European Commission, 2001a)

As stressed above, mutual learning is a key element of modern (or post-modern) thinking on governance. If policy answers have to be given to the questions of a widening political agenda in an environment characterized by growing diversity and complexity, as well as by the presence of an increasing number of cooperating or competing actors with overlapping responsibilities, communication and mutual learning necessarily become the crucial elements of both policy shaping and implementation. This has been formulated very lucidly in a study on European governance by Lebessis and Paterson (2000): since *"none can claim to have an unquestionable understanding of problems, objectives and means, it seems immediately apparent that reform must seek to increase opportunities for collective learning. (..) [These opportunities] would need to encourage an acceptance of the necessarily*

incomplete and provisional nature of any perspective brought to a given interaction and seek to facilitate a mutual critique of those perspectives by the various stakeholders whether expert or lay. This might take the form of obliging stakeholders not only to formulate their position explicitly, but also to explain the effects of that position on other stakeholders and on other aspects of the problem that they bring to light. (..) in other words [they would], be required to demonstrate the coherence of their constructions, not only in terms of their initial position but also in terms of the positions of others which have emerged as part of the process of collective learning."

The term "obliging" is worth stressing here: its justification is given by our growing mutual dependence on each other.
Global and particularly European interdependence is the factor that forces all nations to establish formal guarantees for being informed in time by the others about all their actions that may have an impact on the life of the other.

When we speak about a "learning society" we may mean various things. In this context one specific meaning of this notion should receive attention. In the current global context characterized by rapid changes and by societies being forced to improve their adaptive capacity, social learning becomes a vital process. A learning society may do what learning individuals or learning organisations do: it analyses its environment, elaborates new responses, tries them out, and if needed, corrects its behaviour on the basis of the feedbacks it receives. OMC as a new European policy instrument, through enhancing policy communication, contributes to the creation of the learning society in this sense. It helps the emergence of what Sabel (2001) calls democratic experimentalism, which is a polity based on political learning that helps societies to solve their complex problems. Contributing to the creation of the learning society, as defined above, is also a major mission of education.
There is no other sector, which could do more to enhance the learning capacities of societies, or which could bear greater responsibility for it than education. One would expect that the educational sector would show a particular susceptibility for a governance reform that emphasises communication and mutual learning. Surprisingly other sectors are much more open to join the common European efforts to institutionalise international policy discussion and for this purpose borrow the instrument of benchmarking from the business world. If learning becomes a crucial factor of governance, it is natural that a sector whose

main function is the management of learning cannot remain neutral in a discussion about governance reform. If OMC is a key element of governance reform in Europe, its application in the education sector cannot be seen only through narrow sectoral glasses. If education is to play a key role in the broader social and political reform process that tends to put more stress on communication and mutual learning in governance and policy implementation, there also may appear a need that this sector contributes more constructively to this process.

Moreover, our sector also has its own specific problems of governance, many of them requiring answers that cannot be created within narrow national frameworks. For instance, the changing relationship between the education and the labour market system demands new regulatory tools that are different from those applied in the rather closed traditional school system. The question of applying OMC in the education sector could be seen, therefore, not only as a question of how far we go with the Europeanisation of our national education policies, but also as one that can help us renew our national ways of governing our own education systems. The fact that "*OMC is designed not only to deliver new policy outcomes but also to act as a process for improving policy formation*" (Hodson and Maher, 2001) should not be forgotten in our discussion about this new policy instrument.

The new European policy coordination approach and the education sector

The future of the community coordination of education policies will probably be shaped in a multidimensional field of forces peopled with various actors. In this field the various actors may form various types of alliances, and may enter into various types of conflicts, and the change of power relationships may transform the attitudes of the actors. It may happen, as it already has happened many times, that the fiercest defenders of national sovereignty give up their positions and take a strong standpoint in favour of supranational policy coordination. As far as the education sector is concerned - in the light of the developments of the past few years - one can identify two major dimensions in this field of forces: one opposing those who are within and outside the education sector (e.g. employment and social affairs), and the other opposing the national and the supranational actors (see Figure 1).
In this field of forces four different groups of players can be distinguished:

- EU level sectoral players (e.g. the Education Directorate of the Commission)
- EU level non-sectoral players (e.g. the Employment and Social Affairs Directorate of the Commission)
- member state level sectoral players (e.g. national education ministries or teacher organisation)
- member state level non-sectoral players (e.g. national employment ministries or employer organisations).

Figure 1. The field of forces of the development of community level policy coordination

	Union level players	
1		2
Education sector players		Non-education sector players
3		4
	Member state level players	
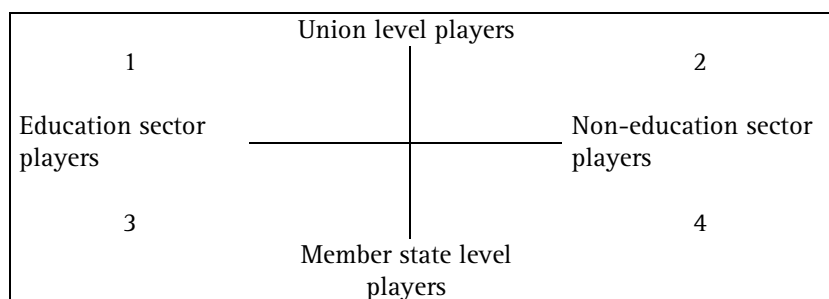
If the non-education sector players (2 and 4) are successful - as was the case in the past few years - in pushing up education policy issues to the community level, the national education sector players (3) may also be constrained to conduct discussions at this level. If they do not do this, it may happen that decisions on issues that are relevant for the sectoral policy are taken without them.

Since the middle of the nineties the non-education sector players have been successful both in extending the scope of employment policy to issues that traditionally have belonged to the jurisdiction of the education sector and in pushing these issues up to community level. As a consequence, not only the community level sectoral players (1) but also those at the national level (3) could have the feeling that an increasing number of education policy issues are dealt with in the framework of the common employment policy.

This was clearly demonstrated by an analysis by the Commission of education and training in the National Action Plans for Employment in 2000, stating that *"the (employment) guidelines, which were originally based more on employment and labour market reform policies, are focusing increasingly on the education and training dimension"* (European Commission, 2001b). The resolution on "the role of education and

training in employment related policies", adopted in 2001 by the Education Council, can also be seen as a sign of sectoral players recognising the importance of asserting education sector interests in community level employment policy-making (Council Resolution 2001/C 204/01).

The future of OMC in the education sector may also depend on the role and weight of the different sectoral professional groups in the policy coordination process. Since indicator-based evaluation and measurement of processes are key elements of OMC, it is quite probable that evaluation professionals may play a crucial role. This can be facilitated by the fact that evaluation is one of the most internationalised professional areas in the education sector, symbolised by such prestigious international associations as IEA or EARLI. The scope and success of some EU quality evaluation programmes (e.g. European Commission, 1999) also demonstrates this, as well as the fact that professional internationalisation in this area has reached circles that belong more to the administrational than to the academic sphere, as demonstrated by the European network of policy makers for the evaluation of education systems or by the Standing International Conference of General Inspectorates of Education (SICI). These professional and administrative circles may feel that the Europeanisation of education policy contributes to upgrading their recognition and competencies, especially if OMC places stress on the use of measurable indicators and on modern quality approaches.

The question of what specific form OMC will take in the education sector has not yet been fully answered. As Hingel (2001) described very clearly, not all the member states have the same view on this. For example while some member states are in favour of introducing the component of producing a regular national report to be subjected to community evaluation, others want to follow up the Lisbon process without direct engagements to such reporting. Exposing their national policies to a regular and open evaluation by the European Council - as it happens in the employment or, more recently, in inclusion policy - is not a way that is easily acceptable for each country, the sensitivity of many of them being particularly high in the field of education. This sector will have to develop its own particular techniques for applying OMC, which is, in fact, a general paradigm for all sectors. Doing this, the European employment strategy could be considered as a reference, but it is important to stress that the method does not have the same strong basis of legitimacy in education.

Another obstacle is that education misses the highly developed culture of follow-up and policy evaluation characterising the employment sector and some other areas. We have already stressed that when thinking about the potential role of OMC in the education sector it is not enough to reflect on how OMC could influence the sector, but one also has to think about the possible role of education in shaping the emerging new European governance model. As we saw earlier OMC is an important component of this model, and the form it will take, as well as the influence it will have depends much on how the different sectors apply it.

Our argument is that for various reasons the educational sector has a particular responsibility in this respect. For example, because of the nature of the new European governance model, focusing on mutual learning, communication and social experimentation - that is on human activities that are highly relevant for education. If society is conceived of as a learning entity, capable of continuously adapting its behaviour to the challenges of the environment, a social subsystem created for learning - which is what the education system is - cannot stay away from this process. A great part of the learning of the society is enhanced and coordinated by the education system. The learning models applied and developed by and within the education system have far-reaching impacts on the learning models applied by the whole society. If societies want to change themselves into more adaptive entities that are capable of learning from each other, to adapt the best practices of others and to use the evaluative feedbacks of others for the improvement of their own learning process, education has to contribute to the development of these capacities.

If international communication becomes a key factor of social development, the education sector cannot remain a closed entity. It is not surprising therefore that one of the three basic clusters of objectives of the common education policy presented in the Detailed Work Programme is *"opening education and training systems to the wider world"* which means both opening towards the domestic social and economic, and the broader European environment. Isolated national education systems rejecting external influences and guided exclusively by their own historical traditions could undermine the broader goal of developing societies into learning entities using international exchanges for their own development.

The way the education sector will react to the challenge of the emerging new European method of policy coordination depends much on how it

conceives its own geopolitical dimensions. This is largely determined by how we see the content and the meaning of education policy. If this is a policy of running national systems of educational provision (a supply oriented approach), the potential benefits of the new process of European policy coordination based on mutual learning will remain limited. But if this is conceived in a broader way as a policy of human learning, the geopolitical dimensions appear immediately in a different light. Educational provision (school buildings, teacher workforce, curricula and textbooks) is national by nature, but learning as a general human activity is universal. For a policy of human learning, focusing on the individual learner - that is on exploring his/her potential or on making his/her learning more relevant and efficient - the national boundaries are less important. Since human learning can take place anywhere and anytime, for such a policy the national state as the natural territorial framework of education becomes less important. From this respect it is highly relevant, that the OECD scenarios on the future of schooling (presented at the ministerial level meeting of the Education Committee of this organisation in 2001) take the geopolitical dimension as one of the five key factors, which seem to determine the future of schooling (OECD, 2001).

The attitude of the actors of the educational sector towards OMC may depend also on the similarity of the community policy coordination techniques with those applied within the national context. If the regulation techniques of OMC - based on communicative pressures through measurable indicators and mutual learning through benchmarking - are similar to those that are applied domestically, the domestic players may feel more familiar with the community method. They may also think that the OMC method learnt at community level will help them manage their own national systems. Those internal professional groups who think that the community level policy coordination may modify the internal field of forces in their countries and give them new "opportunity windows" in domestic politics (Laffan et al., 2000) will probably support the building of strong OMC practice in education, while those who feel threatened by this development will probably reject it.

What is the debate about?

When discussing the potential role of the European Union in the coordination of national education policies, the reaction of many people is characterised by anxieties regarding the shift in the balance of power between the Union and the member states. The discussion is often

dominated by the question whether the national sovereignty of the member states is not infringed, and whether the community is not going too far in interfering into matters traditionally belonging to the jurisdiction of the nations. But the question of how to make education better is probably more urgent and pertinent than the question of how to safeguard national sovereignty in this field.

National sovereignty is an instrument to make things better and not an aim in itself: we are in favour of it, because we think that too much supranational power may do harm to the problem-solving capacity of societies, and not because we think it is an absolute goal. We simply cannot say: "we do not want to shift power from one actor to another one". We also have to have good arguments and good criteria for judging what is better. Problem-solving capacity is a key criterion. If policy is conceived as a collective problem-solving instrument (Laffan et al., 2000, Sabel, 2001), and not as an instrument to assert power, the question of who solves the problem becomes less important than the question whether the problem is solved or not. This has to redirect our thinking about the role of the community in education policy. If it can be proved that daily education policy problems (e.g. combating school failure, elaborating efficient quality assurance frameworks, making education systems more cost-effective or improving the linkages between education and the world of work) can be solved more efficiently and more easily with a stronger and more active community role than without it, then efforts to block the strengthening of community influence cannot be justified.

The way we see the problem-solving capacity of the different (sub-national, national and supranational) actors depends on the way we define education policy problems. The education policy agenda of the different actors may differ substantially: what is a policy problem for one may not be one for another. The different actors have a natural tendency to define the policy agenda - that is to select between problems and non-problems - according to their specific positions and interests.

The EU as a supranational actor itself also has a specific agenda: for instance it tends to focus on the aspects of the educational world that are the most accessible for its action (e.g. such less discovered areas as lifelong learning). This is reinforced also by the national actors who select between the themes that are relevant or non relevant for community action according to what they think could bring a "European added value". The "thematisation" of education policy by the EU, its focus on international competitiveness and the related threats and challenges for the last decades (Field, 1998) offer strong evidence of this.

The risks and dangers in shifting power from national to supranational actors are undeniable. Any supranational power is naturally inclined to reduce national and local diversity, which may lead not only to threatening some fundamental values, but also to the reduction of problem-solving capacities. An authority can always turn the power that was allocated to it for problem-solving into a power having an end in itself. But this can be prevented by various guarantees. If the role of the supranational actor is based on a problem-solving mission, that is if its power is defined and circumscribed so that it can be used only for this purpose, then everybody can gain. One way to do this is when instead of regulating power, analytical and communicative power is assigned to the supranational actor, so that its role becomes one of coordinating the action of national problem-solving rather than that of solving the problems directly. This is what the new Open Method of Coordination offers and this can be applied in the education sector.

In the education sector one of the most debated elements of OMC is related to the use of indicators. The debate is sometimes coloured - as we have already stated before - by the confusion between evaluating policies and evaluating systems. Education is a sector characterized by a strong tradition and also by a sophisticated and highly elaborated technology of evaluation. Evaluating the achievements of pupils, schools or the entire system has been an important policy goal for many years in a number of education systems. International organisations like IEA have been doing such exercises for more than four decades. IEA surveys have long been used to evaluate national education systems, and others, like OECD, have also taken over the technology developed by this organisation.
When the European education ministers - including those of the candidate countries – decided at their Prague meeting in 1998 to develop European quality indicators they did not mean the quality of their policies but that of their systems. The communiqué of the meeting reported about the proposal of countries to *"establish a small number of key indicators or benchmarks to assist national evaluation systems"* (Partners in Europe, 1998).
When following this meeting the national delegates and the Commission started working on selecting and developing quality indicators it was evident that these indicators had to be "policy relevant", but it was less so, whether this meant "important for policy" or "to be used for evaluating policies". The title of the report emerging from this exercise was "European Report on Quality of School Education" (European Commission, 2000b), but some of the sixteen indicators selected had nothing to do with what we traditionally mean by the term "quality of

school education". For example "participation in pre-primary education" or "educational expenditure per student" - which are two of the sixteen "quality indicators" - do not say much about the quality of education: the first can be taken as an equity and the second as an efficiency indicator. It is not clear why these indicators were presented as indicating the quality of education but one reason may be that while improving the quality of education came to be seen by ministers as a legitimate community goal, improving national policies would not yet have been seen as such.

In any case, the lack of distinction between the indicators of education and those of education policy led to much confusion. Education is much more exposed to this type of confusion than other sectors. In employment policy no one thinks that the main task of a minister of labour would be to improve the "quality of work" or the "quality of the labour market". In the field of social policy it is even less probable that the quality of policy is confused with the quality of social care services. A good pension policy cannot be measured through indicators measuring the "quality of pensions". Those who are worrying about the quality of education, and think that the community actions should aim at improving it, do not understand why such indicators as "parent participation" or "education and training of teachers" are used to measure quality.
On the other hand, those who want to check whether governments are doing a good job do not see why this should be done through looking at pupil achievements in mathematics. It may happen that the government of a country which has the worst maths test scores in international comparison is conceiving and implementing the most creative and most efficient policy to change this situation, while in another one, which has excellent test results, the government may not be doing anything to preserve or improve the standards.

The tendency in education to confuse the quality of policy with that of the service was not stopped even after Lisbon, when policy coordination became a legitimate term. However, the situation has clearly improved. In the document which sets down the common policy goals - the "concrete objectives" adopted by the Stockholm summit in 2001 - "quality of education" appears not just as one of the goals, but also as part of a broader cluster together with others, like efficiency or ICT access (Council of the European Union, 2001). Most of the indicators that were connected to the common objectives in the Detailed Work Programme by the Barcelona Summit in 2002 have nothing to do with the quality of

education in the traditional sense of the world. For example the *"percentage of adults with less than upper secondary education who have participated in any form of adult education or training, by age group"* is not an indicator of the quality of education but it can be used well to measure the effectiveness of the policy of a government which introduced tax incentives to encourage adults to engage in learning.

It is essential that we make a clear distinction between the indicators of educational quality and the indicators of the quality of education policy when discussing the role of indicators in OMC in education. Certainly, this distinction is not always easy. Since maintaining and improving the quality of education is one of the most important goals of education policy, it is natural that people want to measure the effectiveness of education policy through measuring the quality of education. But doing this one has to keep in mind a number of factors.

The first is that, even if this is the most important one, quality is only one of the many policy goals. Other typical public policy goals - such as equity, financial efficiency, transparency, predictability or adaptability - are also important and the effectiveness of policy in achieving them has to be measured also. It is possible that, in certain circumstances, we expect that policy sacrifice quality for other goals, although it is much more typical that in such cases the content of quality is redefined.

This leads us to a second important factor. The notion of quality is a social construction: its content depends on conventions accepted by people. The question whether it is possible to create a common European quality notion in spite of the huge diversity in the national interpretations of this term came into the focus particularly strongly when in 1996 EU education ministers decided to launch a common project on quality evaluation, and - based on this - to adopt a Council Resolution. The project was accomplished by 1998 (European Commission, 1999), and three years later the Education Council and the European Parliament adopted a recommendation on quality evaluation in school education. The European recommendation is an excellent example that shows the contextual meaning of quality. When the Council and the Parliament recommended that every country should support or establish "transparent quality evaluation systems", they also added a list of concrete aims that such a system should serve (see box). The success of this exercise shows that it is possible to create a common European understanding of educational quality, although it has to be stressed that this process was focusing on the evaluation of schools and not on the evaluation of pupil achievements.

> **The aims of quality evaluation systems as recommended by the Education Council and the European Parliament**
> - *To secure quality education, whilst promoting social inclusion, and equal opportunities for girls and boys*
> - *to safeguard quality of school education as a basis for lifelong learning*
> - *to encourage school self-evaluation as a method of creating learning and improving schools, within a balanced framework of school self-evaluation and any external evaluations*
> - *to use techniques aimed at improving quality as a means of adapting more successfully to the requirements of a world in rapid and constant change*
> - *to clarify the purpose and the conditions for school self-evaluation*
> - *and to ensure that the approach to self-evaluation is consistent with other forms of regulation*
> - *to develop external evaluation in order to provide methodological support for school self-evaluation and to provide an outside view of the school encouraging a process of continuous improvement and taking care that this is not restricted to purely administrative checks.*

A third factor to be considered is that it is very difficult to establish casual linkages between measurable quality changes in education and concrete policy measures. Following the political transformation the quality of education deteriorated in most post-communist countries (The World Bank, 2001), but no one could establish what the role of the overall economic and social crisis, and that of the sectoral policy of the governments was in this. If the economy collapses and the financial resources for paying teacher salaries and heating schools disappear, the quality of education will deteriorate even if the quality of the education policy of the government is the highest possible. The impact of policy on quality has to be evaluated in a very broad context of many variables. Furthermore, this impact has to be evaluated on a long-term basis. It may happen, for instance, that the government of a society that is not satisfied with the quality of its education system introduces a radical decentralisation policy, giving more autonomy to schools and their clientele to diagnose their own difficulties and to define their own educational goals. Such policies may result in the deterioration of quality

in the short term, while local and institutional actors learn how to use their new autonomy. Evaluators of education policy using short-term measurement of quality indicators may come to the conclusion in such a country that the government should stop its policy of decentralisation, and the opportunity to improve quality on the longer term would be missed.

Finally, there is a fourth factor that has to be kept in mind. Even if one accepts that maintaining and improving the quality of education is the first and most important goal of education policy, even if there is a commonly accepted understanding of what quality means, and even if quality changes can be firmly linked to concrete policy changes, still measuring educational quality cannot be used directly to measure the quality of education policy. As we have already stated, countries with bad educational quality scores may lead excellent policies and, therefore, need a positive feedback from the international community, and other countries with excellent educational quality scores may need a warning signal. Similarly to what happens in many countries when it comes to the evaluation of schools through test scores, the notion of "added value" has to be introduced here. A government which is determined to improve the measurable quality of its education system, or to make schools produce better results than one would expect on the basis of its social and economic conditions, probably applies a better policy than another one, which cannot do this, even if the measurable achievement of its system is lower.

Keeping all these factors in mind the current discussion on the indicators of the Detailed Work Programme may be brought into a new light. If the distinction between evaluating national education systems and evaluating national education policies is made, it is also possible to distinguish between indicators that are good for giving indications on the effectiveness of government policies and those that give messages on the effectiveness of education systems. It may happen that an indicator, which the educational community refuses as one measuring the quality of education, becomes acceptable if it is understood that it measures policy effectiveness.

However, related to this, one more factor has to be underlined: indicators in policy evaluation are used in a particular way, which is different from the way they are used in academic discussions.

Policy evaluation is an extremely complex activity, which is different from research, although it uses similar techniques. It has, for instance, not only a stronger utilitarian aspect, but it is also more strongly linked with judgments, actions, role conflicts and publicity (Weiss, 1988). The function of using indicators in this activity is not only to assure the reliability of the evaluative statements in the scientific sense of the word, but also to rationalise the political communication.

Indicators are instruments that help the participants of political discussion to build up common references, and to avoid interest-led or emotional based actions. Political communication is by nature loaded with non-rational elements: people and societies prefer solutions not only because they are effective but also because they serve their interests. This is one of the reasons why it is important that they agree upon the use of some well-defined indicators. OMC as an instrument of political communication within the European community naturally uses indicators in the way they are used in policy evaluation as opposed to academic research. Our judgement about specific indicators cannot be done exclusively on the basis of their capacity to measure different social processes objectively. Their potential role in the community level political communication also has to be judged.

OMC, as defined earlier, is a form of mutual policy learning, the function of which is more than just giving a feedback to national governments whether they are doing a good job or not. It aims at developing the policy making and policy problem-solving capacities of these governments through meaningful comparisons and through bringing them into a continuous self-evaluation process. The selection and the definition of the indicators that are used in this process have to have sound scientific foundations, but this is not enough. It may happen that a scientifically well-founded indicator blocks political communication, while another one, which is the object of some scientific objections enhances it. This is why, as certain indicators show, serious differences may appear between the views of the researchers who are invited to take part in the indicator development process (who naturally do not want to make concessions to their academic standards) and the Commission, whose agenda is not an academic one (see, for example, Demeuse & Blondin, 2001).

It is important to note that the development of indicators for OMC in the educational sector was not left exclusively to the actors of this sector. While the delegates of the national education ministries were working on the elaboration of new lifelong learning indicators under the coordination of the Educational Directorate of the European Commission,

and produced a report presented to the ministers in summer 2002 in Bratislava (European Commission, 2002), another higher level working group was also engaged in this activity. Parallel with the Lisbon Summit Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union set up an interdisciplinary task force with the aim of defining and selecting the indicators that enable the evaluation of lifelong learning policies in the framework of the employment policy coordination process (see box). A particular mission of this task force was to shift data collection and analysis from the "provider" to the "consumer" that is to the individual learner using the outcomes of, for instance, labour market surveys, household panels or adult literacy surveys.

Task Force on Measuring Lifelong Learning – TFMLL

"In February 2000, the European Commission created a Task Force on measuring lifelong learning (TFMLLL). Representatives from different Directorates General (Education and Culture, Employment and Social Affairs, Research, Eurostat), from five members states (Germany, Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, UK), from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the European Unit of the Eurydice network of Ministries of Education, the Advisory Committee on Statistics in the Economic and Social Spheres (CEIES), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the International Labour Office (ILO) as well as two experts in the field from Denmark and Switzerland (see list at the end of the document) have participated in the work of the TF. The ultimate goal for Eurostat is to create an integrated European Statistical Information System on education and learning. This should make it possible to combine information coming from different sources so as to shed light on different aspects of LLL. This statistical information should also be complemented by contextual information."

(Source: Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2001)

The fact that the creation of educational indicators is being done not only by commissions of experts delegated by the national education ministries and led by the Educational Directorate of the European Commission, but also within this higher level Task Force whose aim is to create *"an integrated European Statistical Information System on education and learning"* is particularly important. It shows that not only the coordination of national education and training policies is worked

out in great part in the framework of the employment and social policy coordination process, but also its technical instruments are developed partly there. It also bears a warning: the discussion of educational experts on indicators should not be isolated from discussions on the same topic elsewhere.

The perspective of the new member countries

This paper is about the European coordination of national education policies from the perspective of the new member countries. The first question to be raised in this perspective is whether there is any particular point of view that is relevant especially for this group of countries. The answer is definitely yes. Thirteen years ago most of these countries belonged to the former Soviet bloc. The greatest reward which political transformation brought to them was national independence and the opportunity to recreate their own national culture on the basis of historical traditions. Education played a key role in this process. Although their education systems had to face a number of challenges that are common with other countries - like those related with scarce resources, youth unemployment, social discrimination and exclusion, financial inefficiency or weaknesses of management and administration - education policy was, in most of them, subordinated to the general task of nation-building and cultural renewal. These policy objectives are fully meaningful only in the national context and require the strengthening of sovereignty. Although the post-communist countries that belonged to the Council of Mutual Economic Aid (COMECON) had experienced some kind of supranational policy coordination, this was seen as a repugnant part of the communist past and the potential benefits of it were rapidly forgotten.

However, international policy advice and evaluation have not disappeared after the political changes. Some international organisations, especially the World Bank, played a very active role in most of the post-communist countries in devising public policy reforms, including those directed to the education sector. World Bank loans, aiming at implementing policies that were designed in cooperation between national administrators and international experts representing the Bank's views on education, were used in such key areas as vocational training and higher education reforms, the development of national evaluation and assessment systems or administrative decentralisation.

Although policy negotiations between the national ministries and the World Bank as a global development agency providing financial resources for reforms was much more directive than anything one could

imagine in the framework of OMC, this could be seen as provisional and it was expected that national sovereignty will be fully restored when the reforms financed from international loans were over. The same is true for the various bilateral aid programs: these had a limited scope and were not felt to be an intrusion into the realm of sovereignty.

The reaction of the new member countries to the use of OMC in the education sector will certainly be determined by their different former international experiences. For instance, those who became members of the OECD in the nineties have already experienced being exposed to international scrutiny. Their ministers have been accustomed not only to see the evaluation of their education policies by international expert panels or to read publications containing evaluation of their systems based on the use of international indicators, but also to be exposed to the "friendly criticisms", which is not alien to this organisation.
When the candidate countries submitted their applications for membership to the European Union they expected that education, according to article of the Maastricht Treaty, would remain a fully national affair. However, in the second half of the nineties, when they began to use the resources of the EU funded PHARE programme to support national human resource development, they quickly realised that the community did not provide support without exercising a strong control over the way it was used. They also could see what kind of negotiations had preceded the allocation of community structural funds for education and training reforms within the Union, in the case of the less developed member countries, like Ireland, Portugal, Greece or Spain. No doubt, this was much more visible for the social, labour and territorial development administrations that liaised directly with those corresponding directorates of the Commission that supervise the use of EU structural funds than for educational administrators.

In the current discourse about OMC in education not much reference is made to the structural policy of the EU. However, as demonstrated above, some parts of the sectoral policy are already coordinated at community level within the framework of the community strategy for employment and social affairs, and a great part of the European Social Fund (ESF) is already being used to support the national implementation of these common policies. An increasing portion of this fund is now being used to finance the lifelong learning objectives of the common employment strategy. In some Central and Eastern European countries education ministers have understood this and set up special units for preparing the reception of ESF money for education sector reforms. They are also

encouraging their experts to build conceptual linkages between the traditional lines of national education policy and the modern European concept of lifelong learning. The same ministers are also sending their representatives to the commissions in Brussels who are working on the follow-up of the Detailed Work Programme adopted in Barcelona in 2002.

These two lines of actions - one related to overall structural policy and the other related to education specific OMC - cannot remain entirely separated. They will certainly be connected, and will either reinforce one another by creating productive synergies or will, on the contrary, enter into competition. But whichever of these two scenarios is realised, OMC in education and OMC in other sectors will have an impact on each other. If, for instance, the expert commission working on teacher competencies (that is on one of the major topics of the first objective of the Detailed Work Programme) arrives at a European agreement on what key competencies teachers in Europe should possess, this certainly will have an influence on all other potential European programmes having teacher training components, even if these are part of a general human resource development programme financed from ESF.

The education ministries of the new member countries will soon realise that if the education sector is capable of formulating strong common European objectives, in harmony with the broader goals of overall social and economic development, this will increase the probability for this sector to acquire community structural support for education reforms. They will experience that the more education becomes a common European affair, the more this sector can benefit from EU structural support. This is one of the reasons why the new member countries, which will all be entitled to get support from the structural funds, will probably move from the position of defending national sovereignty to that of supporting greater European cohesion. Since common European policy will influence education and training through structural measures, it is in the interest of these countries that this is done as directly as possible through the channels of a common education policy and not through those employment or social policies which are beyond their control. This may be the most important factor determining the position of these countries when it comes to the question whether national educational policies should be coordinated at European level or not through a strong OMC process that is targeted specifically to education.

The emergence of a common European education policy is particularly welcome in the new member countries by reformers who want to

modernise their educational system, and who are concerned about such non-conventional policy themes as those that appear in the Detailed Work Programme. They might be delighted by the perspective of peer groups, consisting of international experts, coming to their countries and raising questions about key competencies, quality evaluation, inclusive education or the transformation of schools into *"multi-purpose local learning centres accessible to all"* (European Council, 2000). They may even be happy with the use of international indicators that demonstrate that their country is lagging behind others, since they may use these comparisons as efficient arguments in their national policy debates.

However, the opposite may also appear: the feeling of shame by certain national actors looking at tables containing country rank lists and realising the weak "achievement" of their nation may turn against international comparisons and benchmarking. Policy shaping through communication and mutual learning may also raise problems in some policy circles of the new member countries. Those who were accustomed for decades to live in a system of "democratic centralism", may have difficulties to familiarize with the new mechanisms of "democratic experimentalism" represented by OMC. Some time may be needed to learn how communication and learning can be used as powerful policy regulation instruments.

During the nineties most of the new member countries underwent a fundamental social and political transformation process, and even though they are now stable democracies, their political systems may still be exposed to dramatic shocks following parliamentary elections. This can also shake the education sector and may endanger the implementation of longer-term policies. Political observers in these countries may be happy to see the emergence of a common European educational policy and that of the new "soft instruments" for the enforcement of this policy, because this can help the establishment of longer-term policy planning and higher-level institutional stability at national level. The fact that the community uses mainly symbolic tools, such as setting benchmarks, enhancing communication and mutual learning or giving expert feedback, will probably erase much of the still existing fears from community intrusion into national affairs, and positive expectations may become stronger. Some national actors may salute the formulation of common European educational policy goals because this helps them persuade their hesitating policy-makers to put important but neglected issues on the policy agenda. Financial efficiency or openness to the

labour market, often rejected by significant national professional educational pressure groups, may be among these issues.

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II   Critical analysis

The march for quality of European education

Roger Standaert

The content of the proposals

Part one of this paper describes the evolution of the decision-making process. In the second part, the content of the decisions taken will be clarified.

The Council of Education Ministers in Europe has developed two systems of indicators (Directorate-General, 2000). The sixteen quality indicators defined in 2000 cover four areas:
- *attainment,* seven indicators: mathematics, reading, science, foreign languages, learning to learn, ICT, and civics
- *success and transition,* three indicators: drop out rates, completion of upper secondary education, participation rates in tertiary education
- *monitoring of school education,* two indicators: parental participation, evaluation and steering of school education
- *resources and structures,* four indicators: educational expenditure per student, education and training of teachers, participation rates in pre-primary education, the number of students per computer.

The fifteen indicators for lifelong learning are categorised in four areas (European Commission, 2003):
- *skills, competencies and attitudes*: literacy, numeracy, new skills for the learning society, learning-to-learn skills, citizenship, cultural and social skills
- *access and participation:* access to lifelong learning, participation in lifelong learning
- *resources for lifelong learning*: investment in lifelong learning, trainers for lifelong learning, ICT in learning
- *strategies and systems*: strategies for lifelong learning, coherence of supply, guidance and counselling, accreditation and certification, quality assurance.

Besides the ministers of education, the European Council of the heads of state and government, developed a strategic plan with three strategic objectives at the Lisbon summit in 2000. At the summit of Stockholm the three strategic objectives evolved into thirteen associated objectives.

The thirteen associated objectives approved at the Stockholm summit are:
1. improving education and training for teachers and trainers
2. developing skills for the knowledge based society (literacy, numeracy, key competencies, learning to learn)
3. ensuring access to ICT for everyone
4. increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies
5. making the best use of resources (quality measurements, targets, etc.)
6. open learning environments (flexible systems, EVC (Recognition of acquired skills), careers guidance, individual learning paths, etc.)
7. making learning more attractive
8. supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion
9. strengthening the links with working life and research, and society at large
10. developing the spirit of enterprise
11. improving foreign language learning
12. increasing mobility and exchange (e.g. via the European programmes)
13. strengthening European cooperation (networks, accreditation, mutual recognition of diplomas, Bologna process, etc.).

In this way the three strategic objectives mentioned before were refined into 33 associated objectives. The first five objectives focus on "improving quality and outcomes". The second strategic objective: "improving access to education" comprises the associated objectives 6, 7 and 8. Finally, the third strategic objective "opening up education to the wider world" contains the objectives 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

In the Detailed Work Programme approved at the 2002 Barcelona summit, the thirteen associated objectives have been broken down into 43 key issues, for which indicators and benchmarks have to be developed. A first progress report has to be delivered in 2004 and the targets should be reached by 2010. The Detailed Work Programme is the implementation of one of the conclusions of the Stockholm summit: (the Council of the European Union) which "*stresses that indicators, although, only one element of the follow–up process, represent an important tool for measuring and comparing performance, and that if the process is to be successful and credible, the indicators need to be underpinned by clearly defined, comparable and, above all, policy-relevant data*". (European Council, 2001).
For each of the thirteen associated objectives, the Detailed Work Programme sets out a number of "key issues" followed by "organisation

of the follow–up" indicating the starting period as well as the indicators and the themes for exchanging experience and good practice.

The following example is illustrative. It focuses on learning contents, in particular associated to objective 3.3. "Improving foreign language learning". (For other examples see for instance the contribution of Hostens in this yearbook).

Key issues

1. Encouraging everyone to learn two, or where appropriate, more languages in addition to their mother tongue, and increasing awareness of the importance of foreign language learning at all ages.
2. Encouraging schools and training institutions in using efficient teaching and training methods and motivating continuation of language learning at a later stage of life.

Organisation of the follow–up

- *Starting period:* between the second half of 2002 and end of 2003 (third stage)
- *Indicators for measuring progress (indicative list to be reviewed as appropriate):*
  The Council and the Commission note that no reliable data on the foreign language skills of young people are available; further work must therefore be carried out to obtain them. In the meantime, the following indicative list is adopted:
  - percentage of pupils and students who reach a level of proficiency in two foreign languages (for instance, to level B2 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference.)
  - percentage of language teachers having participated in initial training or in-service training courses involving mobility providing direct contact with the language/culture they teach.
- *Themes for exchanging experience, good practice and, as appropriate, peer review (indicative list):*
  - methods and ways of organising the teaching of languages
  - early language learning
  - ways of promoting the learning of foreign languages.

The same structure is applied to all associated objectives as it also is to associated objective 1.2.: Developing skills for the knowledge based society. This concerns numeracy and literacy, basic competence in mathematics, science and technology, ICT skills, learning to learn, social

skills, entrepreneurship and general culture. Undoubtedly these objectives will have an impact on the curricula of the member states.

Critical reflections

The Commission is going at a very fast pace in cajoling and pushing the European Council. The pace deployed to make Europe economically competitive is, at the very least, surprising. The clear impatience that can be sensed in diverse conclusions and in the work programme suggests that upper level decision makers still believe that a society can be moulded to a given shape. This approach is, apparently, "progressive". In fact, the belief that a society can be moulded with respect to education related to economic evolution has been contradicted several times by facts and by history.

I put forward the proposition that this interpretation of the "Open Method of Coordination" does not contribute to the development of Europe. I want to construct my arguments on the following solid grounds:

- the democratic nature of the decision-making process
- the unilateral focus on economy
- value based education
- the literature of innovation
- the indicators based tunnel-vision
- benchmarking as standardisation.

The democratic nature of the decision-making process

It is striking that the whole decision-making process in relation to the objectives has been realised very rapidly, whereas at national level decision-making processes in educational issues often demand quite long procedures to reach a common vision. Indeed, parliamentary procedures are often very time-consuming because they require a democratic decision-making process and a broad consensus. The EU decisions have been taken by the heads of state and their ministers of education. Although, strictly speaking, there is no specific requirement for them to do so, the engagement of the heads of state and ministers has become, de facto, an important feature.

The European Parliament had almost no say in this decision-making process, neither had the Committee of the Regions, ECOSOC, nor some 800 organisations engaged in the future of Europe. The education sector itself (i.e. teachers in class rooms) did not make any contribution; ministers and heads of state have been advised by unidentified experts. The transparency of the decision-making process may be questioned: who, which groups and/or organisations have been consulted and why?

And what has been the role of the European Parliament? How does the rather limited phrasing of the Maastricht Treaty match the Detailed Work Programme in which at least a hidden tendency standardisation is present? The "Open Method of Coordination" is a euphemism for its actual operationalisation.

The unilateral focus on economy

It is not difficult to identify the strong economic approach in a large proportion of texts dealing with the Lisbon process.

There is the naive belief in the impact of education and training on economic competition. Furthermore, the texts are full of economic jargon: accountability, HRM, indicators, benchmarks, output evaluation, competition, belief in measuring, effectiveness, etc. The whole programme is reminiscent of engineers developing an assembly line for a new car model: they design the machines, construct robots, train the workers for the many sub-functions, and at the end of the line the programmed car appears.

Unfortunately, education does not work that way. People and values can hardly be programmed. It is still up to the students to decide whether they will learn or not and teachers will always have to build a relationship with the students, making predictability just a small and relative minor part of the process

A striking example can be cited from the Barcelona summit where ICT literacy is defined as: "*development of digital literacy: generalisation of an Internet and a computer user's certificate for secondary schools pupils (ECDL)*". The reference to the European Computer Driving Licence is illustrative for the commercial nature of this objective (De Samblanx, 2003). The ECDL contains seven modules: basic concepts of information technology, of file management, word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentations, databases and communication. It is questionable whether every citizen has to reach this level of ICT skills, but what makes it all the more surprising is that a brief glance at the ECDL web site shows that it is all about software developed by a particular American company: Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, Internet Explorer and Outlook. An ECDL manual looks almost as if it is an office manual of this company.

Furthermore, the belief in the impact of education on economic development is naive. Research results show a weak relationship. This is illustrated in a study carried out by Robinson (1999). He made a critical analysis of the results of TIMSS – Third International Mathematics and

Science Study. In most of the participating countries, the impact of the results of this IEA-study is huge. In several countries, there was an assumption that the ranking of results in mathematics and sciences reflected the head start or the arrears in the economy. In a thorough comparison of the economic situation in 39 of the 40 participating countries, Robinson showed that there is a minor negligible correlation between the results in mathematics and sciences in a particular country and its economic level. It is striking that some of the countries of the former Eastern bloc scored very well in TIMSS, whereas their economic situation is very weak. On the other hand, the USA scored low, but economically they are leading the way. This low correlation is confirmed when older results from previous studies are integrated.

Robinson says that there is a consensus on the rational link between the level of attendance of a population to lower and upper secondary education on the one hand and the conditions for a minimalist progress in economy and quality of life on the other. This relationship does not exist when the adult population is sufficiently literate. He warns of a correlation that is understood as a causal relation.

An example of a widely spread trap is the relationship between participation in higher education and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This relationship may also mean that a higher GDP and higher living standards leads to an increased participation in higher education. (Robinson, 1999, 223)

The economic background of the Lisbon process is also illustrated by the fact that in the Detailed Work Programme the European results are compared with data from USA and Japan. The principle of competition is set to a high standard, as the USA and Japan (and East Asia) are also eager to be the most competitive regions in the world.

At least one can state that there is a serious need for a critical, ethical and philosophical analysis of the concept of competition with its underlying assumptions. It is known that this concept is a delicate matter, which causes a great deal of international discourses.

Values based education

What is happening at school is always strongly value based. When the decision is taken to no longer assign homework to primary school pupils, immediately two parties stand up: supporters and opponents. The same goes for foreign language learning at early ages, inclusion of parsing in the primary school curriculum, or calculating with fractions. Besides these examples taken from primary education, there are many others, also from other education levels.

Especially when it is about what children should learn at school heated discussions arise. In many EU member states, fundamental and emotional debates arise when it comes to the definition of attainment targets, education objectives and curricula. One can imagine that it will be hard to develop a common curriculum based on discussions with and within the 25 member states. However, the EU documents, in particular the Detailed Work Programme, already define clear indicators for ICT, literacy, numeracy, basic skills, sciences, technology, entrepreneurship and, last but not least, foreign languages.

It must be possible to question the general validity or the universality of particular objectives. Do different education systems have to implement the same skills and contents? Cummings calls this the way of thinking of ”uni-futurists”: people sharing the opinion that all education systems have to develop in the same direction. From this perspective, some ”global skills” have to be strengthened; e.g. foreign languages and ICT skills. According to Cummings, ”multiple futures” are also an option, i.e. some systems invest more in ICT, others in agriculture and small industries, and still others in biology or in leisure time industries. In this vision, countries can build on what they already have accomplished (Cummings, 1999, 436).

The erosion of thinking about values within European politics in favour of a narrow economically directed thinking leads to restlessness in different social and religiously inspired circles. The late Dutch diplomat, Korthals Altes, represented this uneasiness by pleading in favour of a spiritual renewal in Europe (Korthals Altes, 1999 and 2001). Another Dutch politician, Van Burg, elaborated the same idea in his dissertation on the ”Western culture out of balance” (Van Burg, 2001, 76). He states that, in a dominant economical thinking, man is reduced to a ”homo economicus”. Such an economical model man is, according to the economist Thieleman, not a man of flesh and blood, but an abstraction. This economical model man strives for making large profits and for production and consumption with minimum cost and effort. He is a rational, materialistic individual, with his eyes fixed only upon self-interest. Referring to Sen, this kind of man is called a rational egoist who is exclusively looking for behaviour and situations with a high degree of utility for his own good. In this case the creation of an all-penetrating structure of competition, combined with a never-ending expansion drift, is not far away. In this context slogans such as “standing still is going backwards” and “business is war” are common

Innovation literature

The heads of state want to move fast. The deadline of 2010 and the highly structured indicators and benchmarks show a lack of understanding of the reality of education. For forty years research has been carried out into the way educational innovations are implemented. The mass of literature that was produced clearly shows that innovations in education are complex, require a lot of energy and are time-consuming processes.

Research conclusions can be summarised as follows (Fullan, 1995, pp 91-92):

- innovation begins with a stimulus to motivate future users
- there has to be a balance between external pressure and support: *"pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources"*.
- there is a relationship between practice and convictions. Often, changes in behaviour precede changes in convictions and not the other way around. In general people do not get new insights without having first had some experience (the so-called "implementation dip")
- ownership is a process based on skills, commitment and clarity. There is no ownership at the beginning of the process; it only appears at the end, when the process has been experienced as successful.

The drive behind the development of the Detailed Work Programme is in conflict with almost all innovation principles. It is obvious that processes coming from the world of technology and the economy have been accepted as models. However, education is very different from business and industry that start from raw materials: in education, these are living, interacting, unpredictable individuals and groups. Furthermore, the conflicts of interests and of values in society are reflected in education.

The indicators based tunnel vision

The belief in indicators and benchmarks expresses a strong conviction that society can be moulded. However, the relativity of indicators and benchmarks must be stressed. Many times, the reduction of often complex situations to figures taken out of context, leads to tunnel vision. In other words: the whole diversity of human behaviour must be perceived and understood from the same perspective.

Looking at the popularity of cross-border measurements of indicators and benchmarks, we cannot be blind to the limitations of such comparisons and the distortions that may occur.

First of all, there is a risk that the representation of phenomena by figures is leading to *reductionism* and *absolutism*. The implementation of a mathematical approach to situations and events could lead to the reduction of their measurable aspects. The same pitfalls that exist for the interpretation of statistics are also relevant for indicators. We can read data as if it were an absolute fact. This danger, called "figure blindness" by Bosker (in the Dutch newspaper NRC-Handelsblad, 8 May 2000), is always present.

Another issue is the *range* of an indicator. Very often, indicators only cover part of a more complex phenomenon. The effectiveness of school guidance cannot be covered by totalling the number of failures or drop-outs. Neither can the well-being of teachers be covered completely by focusing on sick-leave figures. The success of a hospital cannot be represented by comparing figures on mortality. Such limited coverage leads to paradoxes and conflicting results, also in areas outside education. If the social policy of a particular country is indicated by its employment rate, the conclusion must be that the USA has a much lower unemployment rate and that, as a consequence, their social policy is better. However, other figures show that the poverty level of the working population in the USA is four times the level of what it is in Belgium. It is clear that the employment indicator is not relevant for the unequal spreading of available jobs over work–rich and work–poor families. Furthermore, the indicator is silent regarding the deprived subgroups that simply have no access to work (e.g. disabled persons), and finally the factor of minimum wage or sufficient salary is missing (Vandenbroucke, 2000, p. 54).

The most important problem is the almost complete absence of *context data*. As the saying goes: apples cannot be compared with oranges. A lot of large-scale comparisons ignore context, they are conducted without taking any context into account. That is why they are no real comparisons and therefore they cannot produce correct information to steer the education policy – although this should be the ultimate objective. The mere presentation of data is very often problematic and can even lead to distortions. The context of quantitative data must be explained by providing a detailed description of the education structure. And even when this information is available, there is still a risk that preference will be given to neatly rounded statistics.

These criticisms are not new. Data collected on the basis of indicators should be adjusted to the differences in education structures, in development levels, in data collection procedures and procedures to define indicators as well as be adapted to the cultural context of the

demands. Although that would be the right way to proceed, it is at the same time an utopian dream. Technically speaking, the adjustment represents an insurmountable difficulty. As an illustration, let us take the following examples of contexts.

Indicators for teenager pregnancies showed bad scores for English-speaking countries (England, Canada, USA, New Zealand). The hypothesis might be that the cultural context for sex education in these English-speaking countries is characterised by timidity, taboo and superficiality, whereas in West–European countries the attitude towards sex education is more open.

Another striking example comes from a TIMSS researcher observing testing in Taiwan. He was astonished to see the young Taiwanese marching into the test room with military discipline, shouting nationalistic slogans. (Times Education Supplement, 26 May 2000).

There is also the problem of *validity and reliability*. By combining data taken from several sources (Eurostat, Eurydice, OECD, IEA, UNESCO, Council of Europe, European indicators, etc.) it must be clear that these have been gathered for different purposes, or that the issue has been accorded a different interpretation. A good example is the comparison of teachers' wages in different countries: are the gross annual salaries compared? Including holiday pay, end of year bonus and other incentives? What about the employers' contribution to social security? What is the level of the annual wages in comparison with wages of other professions?

Concerning learning outcomes: if based on year groups, what is the impact of repeaters? In Spain and Portugal, where the average percentage of repeaters of 25% is not exceptional, this has undoubtedly an impact on the comparability of groups.

Is the coverage by the curriculum taken into account when comparing performance tests?

What is the index for unqualified school leavers?

Is it about a diploma or a literacy level?

What about countries where a diploma is only awarded on the basis of success in a broad and complete package of subjects, as it is the case in Belgium?

In England, pupils at the age of 16 can obtain a certificate for each subject studied, but there is no obligation for a minimum number of subjects. Also the number of unqualified school leavers is controversial. For a country with a drop-out rate of 40% it is easier to halve the drop-out rate than it is for a country with a drop-out rate of 10%. This 10% is

most likely the hardest one and halving it is not obvious at all. Maybe it is even unrealistic to think of reducing this percentage.

Indicators can only be compared if they have been obtained at the same moment. Data that are compared do not always result from recent research and may have been gathered at different times.

All these reflections and comments do not mean that indicators are meaningless. When all the restrictions mentioned above are taken into account, indicators can be quite useful for the self-evaluation. In that case, indicators are the starting point for a discussion in which every country is responsible for the interpretation of the divergences and similarities in relation to its own situation and its concept of education. The following three questions are very useful for the interpretation of and the discussion on indicators:

- What exactly does the indicator measure?
- What is not measured?
- What is the relevance of the data for the given situation?

Benchmarking as standardisation

Benchmarks cannot be used in an uncontrolled way. At first sight, such guidelines look very attractive. Who can be against concrete quality standards? Benchmarks are part of an approach in which the results are the dominant factor. This obviously leads to a strong and marked attention to the standards and efforts that will be combined to reach them. There is not only "teaching for the tests" but also "teaching for the benchmarks". Objectives that do not fit in this approach are classified as less important or even unnecessary, resulting in a lack of a harmonious and broad educational spectrum.

The shortening of waiting lists for medical care in a benchmark may lead to the fact that patients are sent back home too early or, even worse, that patients with complex problems are refused admission. When the observation of timetables is used as *THE* criterion to assess the quality of railway transport, this diligence could jeopardise security.

In England, huge investments should raise the "standards" for reading and mathematics through benchmarks based on the famous numeracy and literacy strategy. It appears that the other subjects have become of secondary importance.

Imagine that the European Union develops a benchmark for the learning of two foreign languages, starting at primary school. Which subjects would have to give way in order to achieve these contents and reach this benchmark? This benchmark could interfere with the growing demand

for graduates having technological and scientific basic knowledge and skills.

Once they have been reached, requirements will become even more stringent and lead to specialisation and one-sidedness.

These examples show that benchmarks should be used with discretion. The setting of benchmarks also requires sufficient means to fulfil the demands made by them. Teachers will ask for smaller class groups, more teaching resources, more discipline of pupils, etc. The government will have to increase investments. When teachers are not involved in the definition of benchmarks, mock behaviour, discouragement and escapism may occur. For example: refusal or discouragement of less gifted children, offering extra help when testing or extra home work to prepare for testing, exemption of lower achieving pupils from testing, etc. Teachers are very well able to turn to this particular kind of creativity!

With regard to reference criteria, the following questions should be asked:

- Does a sufficiently strong basis and motivation exist to demand extra efforts to reach a particular benchmark via the defined guidelines?
- What would be side-effects of the benchmark?

It should be borne in mind that a comparison of complex situations requires qualitative methods such as case studies, typologies, fairly fixed configurations of factors, and not just indicators.

Conclusion

Although this is a very critical contribution, it does not mean that Europeanization in some form or other is senseless. However, Europe can only be shaped when its citizens want it to be. This will require time and a democratic basis. From this perspective, the Lisbon conclusions and their ascendants fail. Europe is too important to be left to a number of highly educated and strictly selected experts. Their competence is not criticised but their democratic mandate, foundations, values and convictions are.

The leitmotiv of this discussion is "more haste, less speed": when major changes are initiated, the best results are obtained by proceeding with deliberation.

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An open method to close doors? – From the perspective of the civil society

Louis Van Beneden

Introduction

In an introduction to the General Assembly of EUNEC, the European Network of Education Councils, held on 1 March 2003, a core of critical remarks on the European approach was formulated. These included remarks concerning the underlying principles, the methodology and the procedures of the European approach to realise the strategic objective related to education and training. It is an undoubted fact that the economic prospective with the development of the free market is considered the dominant ideology in Europe, to the extent that it seems to be taken for granted that everybody, including the cultural, social and educational sector, would accept this ideology without any criticism (Van Beneden, 2003). More particularly we criticised the growing democratic shortfall, "the democratic deficit", of decision-making in Europe's education and training sector if there was not to be a clear agreement on how and under what conditions the Open Method of Coordination could be used. We do not stand alone in this concern as we can notice from statements, official and otherwise, a concern also found in many other spheres of interest, as we will see further on in this article.

On 17 June 2002, the Belgian minister of Social Affairs and Pensions, Frank Vandenbroucke, presented a paper at the Max Planck Institut für Sozialwissenschaften in Cologne, entitled: "The EU and social protection: what should the European Convention propose?" (Vandenbroucke, 2002). In later meetings he came back to the thesis he presented in Cologne, e.g. in an intervention at the IRRI-NBB Conference on "Models of cooperation in an enlarged EU", Brussels, 28 January 2003 (Vandenbroucke, 2003-1). More importantly, he did this again in a session of the Working Group XI of the European Convention on 21 January 2003 (Vandenbroucke, 2003-2). Reading his arguments and proposals it seems obvious to conclude that, to a large extent, they are as valid for the educational sector as they are for the area of social policy. Nevertheless, in different programmes, in or related to the social policy agenda, education and training are prominently integrated. To achieve the Lisbon strategy it must be noted that different programmes and initiatives have direct consequences on

education and training. Universal approaches of educational goals and objectives are prominent in initiatives such as the European Employment Strategy, the E-learning programme, the Action Plan for skills and mobility; initiatives in order to improve more investment in "human capital", the role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge, the Research Programme. All these result in a direct impact on education and training policies. In most cases the Open Method of Coordination will be applied. For that reason the following paragraphs deal with the specifics of social policy that have a direct relevance to education and training policies.

Reading the conclusions and comments of Working Group XI of the European Convention, the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament, the open letter to the Convention from the influential European Policy Centre and the report of a seminar organised by the EU Committee of the Regions on the Open Method of Coordination (for references see further), we may conclude that many important policy makers in Europe share a concern about the future of policies based on an (non adapted or conditioned) Open Method of Coordination. For that reason we would like to present some of these concerns, ideas and comments and try to deduce what is relevant for the educational sector. What kind of provisions should be proposed to find a solution for unsolved obstacles in the European regulations?

The origin of the Open Method of Coordination

The methodological foundations for the Open Method of Coordination as a new Europe-wide approach to social and education policy, were formally laid down at the Lisbon summit in March 2000. Before that, policy coordination at EU-level had been applied to economic policy (multilateral surveillance of national economic policies, provided for by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty) as well as in the field of employment (the Luxemburg process, formalised by the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty as "coordinated strategy for employment" and fine-tuned by the Luxemburg European Council the same year). Frank Vandenbroucke (Vandenbroucke, 2002) distinguishes "policy coordination", established before the Lisbon Summit (for which a formal basis exists in the Treaty), and the "Open Method of Coordination" as it was defined in Lisbon. Together they constitute however one "cookbook" of soft-law methodologies, and in the political debate these methodologies are often placed together under the general heading of "open coordination". We will see that this distinction can have a particular importance for education policy, particularly for

what we call the transnational programmes in which the education sector (and the education ministers!) are often marginalized even on issues with direct consequences on education policies.

The definition of Open Method of Coordination?

The Open Method of Coordination is a process in which clear and mutually agreed objectives are defined, after which peer review, on the basis of national action plans, enables EU member states to compare practices and learn from each other. This method respects -and is in fact built on – local diversity, it is flexible, but aims to promote progress in a particular sphere of interest. An efficient learning process requires the use of comparable and commonly agreed indicators in order to monitor progress towards the common goals as well as evaluation and, possibly, soft recommendations made by the European Commission and the Council. The exchange of reliable information aims, to some extent at least, at institutionalising intelligent "policy mimicking" (Hemerijck, 2000). We are aware that in the Open Method of Coordination, the member states agree and accept on a voluntary basis a joint strategy to achieve a certain objective. In reality this turns out to be "compulsory volunteering" with a strong influence on the national or regional agenda. No country dares to stay on the sideline. As regards education, apart from the Education Council and the Education Commission, some tasks are also taken care of by expert groups. They work out the indicators, benchmarks, good practice strategies, peer review, etc. to be presented to the Council of ministers of education who are supposed to report annually to the European Council on the progress in the realisation of the objectives. A few representatives of the educational stakeholders at European level are allowed to participate.

Again, the objectives and related procedures are not imposed upon national governments. But as it is written in the joint declaration of the ministers of education convened in Bologna on 19 June 1999: *"Any pressure individual countries and higher education institutions may feel from the Bologna process could only result from their ignoring increasingly common features of staying outside the mainstream of change"* (Bologna, 1999). Since the same philosophy is at the basis of the objectives and other programmes and initiatives related to education, this could result in very different policies in different countries since no consultation is prescribed for whatever level. At this stage even the European Parliament is not supposed to play any role. To use an understatement: this Open Method of Coordination is not necessarily the most democratic approach (Van Beneden, 2003).

A severe judgment

In its report on the analysis of the open coordination procedure in the field of employment and social affairs, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament formulated the following critical statement: *"The European Parliament and the European Court of Justice are the traditional guardians of democratic debate in Europe. Parliament is either excluded as a formal or informal partner from all the various manifestations of the open coordination method, or marginalized as in the case of the employment strategy."* The Committee concluded: *"Although the Open Method of Coordination is undoubtedly a useful instrument, nevertheless its scope should be defined and the relevant procedure established by enshrining it in the Treaty. Care should be taken, therefore, to spell out the principle that the method may not be used as a substitute for more binding forms of Community regulation in order to evade them, without necessarily excluding the possibility of the Open Method of Coordination being used to accompany legislative measures with a view to extending their range.*
Furthermore, the role of the European Parliament must be clarified and enhanced, as should the role of the national parliaments, the social partners and civil society, and local and regional bodies" (European Parliament, 2003).

The resolution text clearly states that the European Parliament must be consulted and that the Economic and Social Committee should be given a voice in the guidelines, the summary report and the recommendations concerning the application of the Open Method of Coordination. Each national report must indicate at what level, and by what means, representatives of civil society and local, regional and national authorities have been consulted.

The position of two relevant European institutions

The EESC (European Economic and Social Committee)
Created by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body of the European Union. The Nice Treaty, signed in 2001, states that *"The European Economic and Social Committee (consists) of representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society"*. It has a distinctive place in the Community's decision-making process. It is an assembly of representatives from the various spheres of economic and social activity and a valuable forum for representing and informing civil organisations

and expressing their views. The members of the Committee play an integral part in the process of policy formation and decision-making within the Community (EESC). The education sector as such has no representatives in the delegation of the civil society. All matters concerning economic and social issues are subject of debate and conclusions by the EESC, including items in the domain of education and training, again without the involvement of any representatives qualitate qua of the education sector since "education" is not a formal area of direct involvement of the EU.

Of course, the EESC insists on the involvement of the social partners in all processes based on the Open Method of Coordination. Given the scope of the Detailed Work Programme on educational objectives and the economic and social framework within which they are situated, it is feared that for a lot of issues concerning educational policy, based on the Open Method of Coordination, the consultation of social partners will continue to be organised without the participation of educational partners.

The EU Committee of the Regions (CoR)

The Treaties oblige the Commission and Council to consult the Committee of the Regions whenever new proposals are made in areas that have repercussions at regional or local level. The Maastricht Treaty sets out five such areas - economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture. The Amsterdam Treaty added another five areas to the list - employment policy, social policy, the environment, vocational training and transport - which now covers much of the scope of the EU's activity. No doubt, the full domain of education linked matters are subjects of consultation by the Committee of the Regions.

The Work Programme 2003 of the Commission for Culture and Education (EDUC) in the CoR announces the subjects to be dealt with in the Commission's legislative and work programme but states:
"Communication on benchmarking in education and training and the future joint commission/council report on the objectives of education and training systems and lifelong learning (Open Method of Coordination)"
(The Committee of the Regions -EDUC Commission, 2003). In November 2001 the CoR published a statement "The Committee of the Regions - place and participation in the European decision-making process" (The Committee of the Regions, 2003) considering it (in point 2.6) "*necessary that sufficient scope and resources be made available for:*
- *the holding of political debate and discussions at all levels in order to awaken the public's interest in politics*

- *additional information and awareness-raising efforts*
- *a special focus on the subject in school and further education curricula*
- *increasing citizens' on-going contribution to European policy, e.g. by involving the social players and civil society in European policy in a structural way".*

Are the representatives of the education sector also being prominently integrated?
In the report of the two-day "Conference on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Improving European Governance?" (Committee of the Regions, 2002), organised by the CoR in Brussels on 30 September and 1 October 2002, several interesting arguments were put forward. We quote some of them because they confirm our own remarks formulated in The Hague, March 2003.

In his introduction the president of the EDUC Commission, Henning Jensen, stated that because of the citizens' lack of confidence the use of the OMC raises some concerns and questions, which need to be answered.

Jonathan Zeitlin, director of the European Union Centre, University of Wisconsin-Madison stated that the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the method depends on the participation of the widest range of actors in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation at all levels. To build a normative consensus around common objectives, the involvement of NGOs and other civil society actors has to be promoted.
Referring to the Employment Policy (in the Treaty) he said that a lack of transparency and involvement has been identified in the evaluation. Information had flowed only in a one-way direction. It is imperative that the process must be opened to participation and must be made more transparent. OMC can only become fully legitimate and effective if it mobilises the participation of a wide range of actors at all levels, above all the local, and provides them with systematic tools to help one another in solving the practical problems that confront them on the ground.

Peter Van Nuffel, Task Force, Secretariat General EU, reminded the participants that the OMC is only an additional instrument and is described as a process that is different from the usual way of legislation. There is reference to OMC in the Treaty in a number of policy areas such as economic policy. But the European Parliament and other EU institutions are not mentioned. As for the member states, only governmental representatives are mentioned.

In the Lisbon conclusions it is noted that the OMC must be used in a decentralised way without further explanation whereas article 3 of the Treaty refers to all areas. The OMC cannot be used in areas where the EU has exclusive right of jurisdiction. The role of institutions when using OMC is a question for the Convention.

Irini Pari, a member of the Economic and Social Committee, underlined that the OMC, when applied, should reflect the principles of subsidiary and proportionality. If it involves both social partners and civil society at an EU level, then the OMC can be an important instrument to promote economic and social cohesion. In the EESC resolution sent to the Convention, the EESC called for a legal base for the OMC in the new Treaty. To meet the objective of better implementation and evaluation all players must take part. Overlapping between policy sectors must be avoided as well as the bureaucratic trap.

As far as OMC in the education area is concerned a representative of the Länder of Germany, Erich Thies, noted that any harmonisation of legislation must be excluded. The objective for the process of OMC is to reach greater convergence on educational systems, but that has been rejected by the member states (!?) due to the lack of democratic legitimacy. Any further cooperation on education should be initiated in a process beginning from the bottom up.

Anders Hingel, DG Culture and Education, EU, noted that the Commission presented in 2001 a document explaining how the OMC could be used in the field of education. Legislation is to be excluded. The process will be monitored by measuring continuously average levels according to the indicators established by the Council looking at the average of the three best performing countries, and by comparing them to the USA and Japan. Decisions will not be taken at EU level, but pressure will be put on member states and regions to take actions and improve education systems.
For more information about this document: see the contribution of Lars Bo Jakobsen in this Yearbook.

Can it been looked at differently?

To answer that question let us consult the articles by Frank Vandenbroucke, referred to in the introductory paragraph (Vandenbroucke, 2002 and 2003-1 and 2).

For Vandenbroucke this "open" approach can effectively lead to social progress. Defining commonly agreed objectives is much more than merely a useful technique in view of the intended progress in the member states. Common objectives are essential because they allow us to translate the much discussed but rather abstract "European social model" into a tangible set of agreed objectives to be rooted in European coordination. For the first time, thanks to the Open Method of Coordination, these abstract concepts are being interpreted by means of more precise definitions of the outcomes which we want to achieve.

In accordance with Anton Hemerijck (Hemerijck, 2000) Vandenbroucke claims that the Open Method of Coordination is both a cognitive and a normative tool. It is a "cognitive" tool, because it allows us to learn from each other. This is not restricted to the practice of other member states, but also extends to their underlying views and opinions, an area that is no less important. Open coordination is a "normative" tool because common objectives inevitably embody substantive views on social justice. Thus open coordination gradually creates a European social policy paradigm. But, undoubtedly the same goes for education policy, a policy that may not have that name if the educational authorities continue to serve, at least in their words, the full autonomy of the member states. Referring to the Luxemburg Employment Process (on the basis of article 128 of the Treaty) individual recommendations are made to individual member states in relation to the annual report which they have to submit. In the Open Method of Coordination member states report to each other how they include commonly agreed objectives in their national policy, with a yearly update, which enables them to integrate common conclusions into the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines drawn up by the Union every year. In other words, policy coordination and open coordination together constitute a "cookbook" that contains various recipes, both light and heavy. Using this cookbook one has to bear certain key principles in mind. In doing so for social policy Vandenbroucke is clearly underlining the principles that we regard as being essential once the Open Method of Coordination is applied to an educational policy:

- This is only one method amongst many. We cannot create a social Europe on the wing of open coordination alone. We also need another wing, namely -legislative work. Therefore, the Open Method of Coordination must not replace legislative work which is vital.
- We must not confuse the objectives with the instruments. Confusing these elements goes against the spirit of subsidiary which is fundamental to the Open Method of Coordination. Moreover, lack of

clarity with regard to fundamental objectives leads to biased policy analyses.

- The third principle is "comprehensiveness": we have to include all possible tools in the analysis.
- The fourth principle concerns the choice of those benchmarks which we use when we put objectives into practices. When we define our standards we have to be realistic and ambitious at the same time. We definitely need the best practice in the learning process: feasible "standards of excellence" instead of standards of mediocrity.
- The fifth and final principle for the useful application of the Open Method of Coordination is located at the practical level. We cannot possibly measure progress without comparable and quantitative indicators.

"Soft" open coordination and consensus building can go far beyond solemn but vague declarations at European summits. The experience in the field of employment shows that important changes and innovations in all branches of employment policy have occurred. The "convergence stress" has been very real, and tangible results can be indicated. When Vandenbroucke reminds us that legitimate questions are raised, notably by the European Parliament, about the relation between open coordination and democratic decision-making in Europe, he is touching upon a very import issue. One of the potential gains of open coordination is that it requires all national governments to prepare and discuss their policy reforms in public, and to do this, moreover, simultaneously. Open coordination definitely implies "openness" in that sense too.

On the one hand, we know from experience that this is rarely encountered when it concerns education policy. On the other hand, the absence of formal involvement of the European Parliament points to a democratic deficit, as we mentioned before. As far as social policies are concerned there is a consultation procedure for many issues. Besides, a role for the European Parliament, the involvement of the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee is prescribed in the Treaty. For certain aspects educational matters are involved but without the participation of representatives from the education sector. As far as the educational objectives are concerned no consultation procedures involving the sector are prescribed. The argument being that the democratic deficit of a policy based on the Open Method of Coordination is still more relevant.

Quite rightly Vandenbroucke underlines the potential risk regarding the further development of this method. It might gradually change the actual

balance between the European institutions - the Parliament, the Council, the Commission - in an undesirable way, which is detrimental both for the Parliament and the Commission. Open coordination must not replace other policy tools that have proven their usefulness; it should not be an instrument used against either the Commission or the Parliament. Moreover, without involvement of the Commission, effective open coordination itself is difficult to envisage. An even more detrimental situation occurs when objectives decided by the Summit have to be executed by the education ministers, guided and inspired by the Commission, without a fundamental democratic debate at European level and, as we experience in many countries, even at national level. Of course, Vandenbroucke states, the Open Coordination Method is not a panacea, let alone a magic formula. If we employ it judiciously, open coordination is a pro-active and creative method that allows us to define a "social Europe" in more specific terms and to anchor it firmly as a common collective good at the heart of European cooperation. As long as the conditions we mentioned above are not encountered we can hardly say that this would be equally true as far as the education policy is concerned.

Indispensable actions

Referring to the publication by Stephan Leibfried and Paul Pierson (Leibfried and Pierson, in Vandenbroucke, 2002) on policy-making in the European Union Vandenbroucke cites: *"The process of European integration has eroded both the sovereignty (by which we mean legal authority) and autonomy (by which we mean de facto regulatory capacity) of member states in the realm of social policy. National welfare states remain the primary institutions of European social policy, but they do so in the context of an increasingly constraining multi-tiered policy"*. Vandenbroucke adds: *"In addition to direct pressures on national welfare states resulting from social policy initiatives undertaken by the European institutions, the dynamics of market integration have created indirect pressures on national welfare states, de jure, through the direct imposition of market compatibility requirements by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), and de facto by the forces of economic competition in an integrated market."*

Direct imposition of market compatibility requirements ("negative policy reform") mainly occurs through the application of two fundamental freedoms provided for in the Treaty: the free movement of workers and the freedom to provide services. Do we have to point out that the

consequences of the free movement of workers, freedom legitimised European initiatives, in the field of education and that the provision of the articles 126 and 127 in the Maastricht Treaty (articles 149 and 150 in the Amsterdam Treaty) were a direct reaction to the interpretation given by the European Court of Justice to previous articles concerning vocational education and the education of children of migrant workers? The application of the principle of free movement of services, more specifically for migrant workers, is closely linked to the fact that the treaties, as well as secondary European law, focus on economic activity and entrepreneurial freedoms. The question is obviously: do welfare state services constitute an economic activity? Fortunately, European integration does acknowledge non-economic true welfare activity, according to Vandenbroucke. However, there is no general exemption for welfare state activity from the treaty's market freedoms, and the distinction between "economic" and "welfare" (or solidarity) activity is not always clear-cut. Hence, drawing - and continually redrawing - this line between "economic" and "solidarity" activity is what much of the legal conflict and judgements of the European Court of Justice is about.

What is needed?

According to Vandenbroucke (Vandenbroucke, 2002) the following actions seem to be indispensable in creating a clear balance between the principles of the single market and the principles pursued by national welfare states:

- *"Firstly, we would have to include the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the constitutional Treaty.*
- *Secondly, to express clearly the idea that the social dimension is part and parcel of the Union, it is crucial to reformulate the general principles of the European Community, as laid down in articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty, to anchor a commitment to social protection to the new Treaty. Since this principle would have a "horizontal" nature, all actions undertaken by the Union would have to take it into account.*
- *Thirdly, we need a legal basis for the Open Method of Coordination as it is to be applied in the field of social protection and social inclusion. This legal basis should guarantee the transfer of the results of the Open Method of Coordination in the social domain to the economic and budgetary policy coordination at the level of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.*
- *Fourthly, enlargement demands that we increase the efficiency of decision-making with regard to the social provisions of the Treaty.*

- *Fifthly, social partners should themselves be able to decide which issues relating to employment they want to negotiate. All European collective agreements could be declared legally binding by QMV (Qualified Majority Vote).*
- *Finally, it would seem advisable to ensure that agreements concluded by means of collective bargaining between the social partners on a basis of social solidarity should enjoy a particular legal status, recognised by the Treaty. It would seem equally appropriate to specify in the Treaty the concept of "service of general economic interest".*

Where he stated that the economic and institutional dynamics of creating a single market have made it increasingly difficult to exclude social issues from the EU's agenda, the tide separating market issues, belonging to the supranational sphere, and social issues, belonging tot the national spheres, is unsustainable. We are convinced that the same fact is equally true for education policies. However, the answer to this problem is not an additional transfer of national decision-making to the EU, nor the imposition of uniformity, let alone harmonisation for the sake of harmonisation. Although, he stresses that the concept of "a European social model" does not only make sense, but should be specified by means of "common objectives". He thinks national governments could not possibly agree on an detailed European blueprint for the core functions of the welfare state. National diversity cannot be treated as illegitimate, on the contrary, it is itself part of the legitimating structure of beliefs and practices supporting the multilevel European policy. Moreover, as the Treaty of the EU prohibits any harmonisation in the field of education the European institutions can only work towards a growing convergence of the different systems by encouraging the member states and the educational and training institutions to follow this method. Such an outcome can be fostered by the legal framework protecting the individual rights of non-discrimination and the free movement of workers and of services on the one hand and indirectly effective and non-binding measures on the other.

A proposal from the Belgian delegation at the Convention consisted of introducing a specific article in the "political" part of the treaty that should meet the following requirements:
- make it clear that open coordination applies to two specific matters in the broad social policy field: the modernisation of social protection and the promotion of social inclusion (not replacing "hard EU law", in those domains where a "hard law" approach is indicated!). The direct and indirect links with matters of educational

policy are undoubted, as we indicated above. Would it not be logical then, that in this context, education and training should be mentioned specifically? Would this mean that educational matters, as far as they are part and parcel of social programmes have to be integrated in article 12 of the Treaty concerning "shared competencies", such as "social policy", and remain only for specific educational matters under "areas for supporting action"? In fact, in an open letter to the Convention Anne Corbett and Hywel Ceri Jones of the European Policy Centre (The European Policy Centre, 2003) are defending the thesis that "education" should be integrated as "shared competencies" (i.e., area of responsibility and action). They urge the Convention *"to be coherent in support of a community dynamic by locating education and culture within the framework of "shared competencies" rather than in an ambiguous category of "supporting actions".*

- make it unambiguously clear that open coordination on subject matters will not depend on political good will, but shall be stated as an obligation by the Treaty
- define the role of the European Parliament, and of the social partners
- provide for the possibility, but not the obligation, of developing guidelines
- require the incorporation of the results of the process into the broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

Important proposals to the Convention

From the report of Working Group XI of the Convention on Social Europe (The European Convention, 2003) we wish to highlight some important remarks and conclusions.

There was consensus in the Group to recommend that article 3 of the future Constitutional Treaty should include a number of important social objectives to be promoted.
Point 2 of the conclusions reads as follows: *"On the social objectives of the Union, the Group recommends that article 3 of the Constitutional Treaty include the promotion of: full employment, social justice, social peace, sustainable development, economic, social and territorial cohesion, social market economy, quality of work, lifelong learning, social inclusion, a high degree of social protection, equality between men and women, children's rights, non-discrimination on the basis or racial or ethnic origin, religious or sexual orientation, disability and age, a high*

level of public health and efficient and high quality social services and services of general interest".

The texts in italics are the core of the work programme concerning the objectives for education and training. Would it be logic and acceptable that the educational partners would not be fully involved in the decision-making process where the other representatives of the social partners and the civil society, not to mention the European Parliament, United Nations Economic and Social Council and the Committee of the Regions would be respected partners in this process?

Point 4 of the conclusions reads: *"The Group broadly supports the inclusion of the Open Method of Coordination in the Treaty, in such a manner as to clarify the procedures and respective roles of those involved".* This provision should indicate clearly that the Open Method of Coordination cannot be used to undermine existing Union or member state competence. Commenting on this conclusion the Group stated clearly that most members requested the insertion into the Treaty of a horizontal provision defining the Open Method of Coordination and its procedure. Specifying that the method can be applied only where no Union legislative competence is enshrined and in areas other than those where the coordination of national policies is defined by a special provision of the Treaty (article 99 in economic matters and article 128 in the area of employment in particular) (par. 43).

The method would in principle be implemented each time by a decision of the member states meeting within the Council on the basis of the Conclusions of the European Council on the initiative of the European Commission, with notification of the European Parliament. National parliaments and regional or local authorities could be consulted during implementation, as could the social partners when the Open Method of Coordination is applied to the social field. Civil society could, possibly, be consulted when the matter under coordination lends itself to such a method. The Commission would be responsible for analysing and evaluating the action plans. The outcome of the Commission's analysis could be discussed within the European and national parliaments. The Commission would have the power to make recommendations to member states' governments and to inform national parliaments directly of their opinions in order to trigger a "peer review" procedure and a national debate, the aim being to allow member states, within the Union framework, to set themselves common objectives while retaining national flexibility in their implementation (par. 45). Some areas to which the

method could be applied were mentioned in the Group, such as education, tax harmonisation and the establishment of minimum social standards (par. 47).

Point 7 is highly relevant. The Group recommends that the role of the social partners be recognised explicitly in the Constitutional Treaty, that adequate consultation provisions should be included and that the existing arrangements for negotiation of social agreements should be enhanced. Civil organisations should also be given a role, especially in combating social exclusion, without prejudice to the existing special position of social partners in the social dialogue process. In fact, this conclusion recognises that civil society is more than the actual partners in the social dialogue and should logically be defined and recognised. The report is very clear in this respect.

Having remembered that the existing Treaties confer a specific role on the social partners in the field of social policy (articles 137, 138 and 139), (in par. 64) the report underlines that the "Lisbon process" acknowledges the important role of employees and employers. It has taken the form of regular "social affairs summits" on the occasion of spring European Councils, which offer management and labour the opportunity to give their point of view on the issues discussed by the Council (par. 65). It was agreed that this role (of employees and employers federations) should be specified in Title VI of the Constitution, and it was pointed out that this role should be distinct from that played by organised civil society which should also be recognised (par. 66).

While endorsing the specific role of management and union bodies in negotiating pan-European agreements, some members recommended flexibility in the definition of "social partnership" to include a wider relevant stakeholder group in all other social and economic consultations where negotiated agreements are not at issue (par. 67).

Finally, numerous comments were made on the recognition of the growing role of civil society and the recognition of a European statute for associations and for other forms of organisation such as private, non-profit services (par. 69).

Elements for a conclusion

Taking into account that the comments and proposals as they are formulated in the conclusions of Working Group XI, following the critical remarks coming from important policy makers, an adequate solution to the problems concerning the lack of democracy and transparency is imperative. The absence of a guaranteed involvement of

the educational partners in the decision-making process can no longer be justified. To make this proposal as adequate for education as it is for social matters a reference to education in the list of "shared competencies" seems to be necessary. The recognition of educational partners in the appropriate dialogue is imperative in our point of view. The conclusions of the debates in Working Group XI clearly underline the legitimacy of our expectations.

Of course, in any circumstance, the input of the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions, like the right of the European Economic and Social Committee (EECS) to be consulted on all economic and social initiatives, must be completely respected. This does not exclude the relevance of a specific educational consultative structure. After reading the draft of the European Constitution, which was presented to the European Council by the Convention, we came to the regrettable conclusion that the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), is not mentioned as such. The persistant objection, however, is particularly the fact that for all the working areas to which this method should be applied its procedure has been described, except for that of education. Incorporated in transversal programmes education linked themes are dealt with in official procedures, but there is no specific officialised procedure. To treat education as a support policy interferes with the autonomy of this key policy domain, in the name of the autonomy of the member states.

Whatever is possible to improve the situation at a European level, a full involvement of the educational partners in the national policy in relation to the developments in Europe, remains essential. In too many cases there is no democratic debate regarding European education programmes, the projects, action plans and strategic objectives conceived at European level, in the national context. Parliaments, social partners, educational partners are all too seldom consulted before governments subscribe to European agreements or their implementation (Van Beneden, 2003).

If that is the case, is it not our democratic right to openly ask just who is involved on our behalf - as citizens of a member state and stakeholders in the field of education and training - in the process of taking positions and in the engagements that result from these points of view? It is also not clear to whom an account is to be given.

Given the scope and consequences of European policy a broad social debate should be held before any European arrangements are made. Europe is too often used as an alibi to explain away one's own not very democratically formed positions. The danger is there that the European policy process becomes an increasingly technocratic one, both at the

European and national level. The European agenda is not the logical execution of educational evolutions, which those in the field consider necessary. Still, everybody is driven by an agenda controlled by European technocrats. This is one more reason to involve the representatives of the educational community at all stages of the process. Education cannot be reformed just by legislation and procedures. The more so when they are neither the result of a democratic process on a European nor at a national level.

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Benchmarking for European community countries – A critical analysis

Linda Badham

Background

There can be few countries in Europe that would set their faces against the European Council's strategic vision of becoming *"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"* (European Council, 2002). Reflections of that aspiration are evident in all our individual governments' policy statements and in some of the specific targets towards which our schools and colleges are expected to aspire. However the question that this chapter seeks to address is whether the five benchmarks that the European Commission has suggested (Commission of the European Communities, 2002) are likely to promote development towards achieving this strategic vision.

There is a strong case to be made for going beyond agreement on a broad strategic vision to agreeing specific goals. International benchmarks should serve to set clear targets that help both individual nations and Europe as a whole make real progress towards agreed goals that are really worth striving for. They should be expressed in the form of measures against which each nation can objectively assess how it is doing relative to where it is now and where it would like to be, and to make that assessment relative to what is being achieved in other countries.

This paper seeks to analyse whether the reality matches that aspiration, drawing specifically on the experience of using targets and benchmarks to promote improvements in the education of 5-19 year-olds in Wales over the last fifteen years.

The functionality of targets and benchmarks

For the purposes of this paper, the terms "benchmarks" and "targets" will be used interchangeably as the Commission's proposed five benchmarks

are intended to be used as specific targets (concrete goals) by all member states.

The primary purpose of benchmarking or target-setting is to raise standards. However, that primary purpose subsumes the twin functions of improvement and accountability. Clear targets can help to improve the quality of education and enhance outcomes. Objective measurement and reporting against such targets can serve to prove what has been achieved and allow comparisons to be made. These principles are applied at all levels in Wales. Thus teachers encourage individual learners to set targets, plan what they need to do to meet these targets and monitor progress towards achieving them. The same is true for departments within schools and colleges, the schools and colleges themselves, local education authorities and Wales as a nation.

Targets can be highly effective where they motivate and focus the efforts of all key players. They can also serve to prioritise the use of resources. Targets can therefore support increased effectiveness and efficiency. However, because of their accountability function, it is all too easy for targets to be seen as bureaucratic impositions that have to be "serviced" for their own sake rather than as tools to improve the quality of education. Under these circumstances, there is a serious risk that targets can serve to distort and even undermine the very goals that they were set to promote. The next sections of this chapter offer an analysis of the features of effective targets and then go on to illustrate some of the risks associated with the use of targets in practice, at a national level.

Features of effective national targets

The first characteristic of effective targets is assent: targets function best when those who have to work to achieve them have either set the targets themselves or have agreed to them. All key players should agree that the targets are worth striving for, and that they have the support and resources necessary for achieving those targets. They also need to agree that the ways in which their success is to be measured are valid and reliable.

This "assent" can be a source of potential conflict when governments seek to set targets with which schools do not concur. Nevertheless, assent to national targets is worth striving for. National targets provide an element of externality that can both set the necessary level of challenge for improvement and ensure commonality and objectivity in the measures used to recognise that improvement. However, if governments

impose targets unilaterally, they are likely to encounter at the least non-compliance and even outright resistance from those who actually have to make the improvements happen.

Secondly, there are some more technical features of effective targets. They should be "SMART" – specific, measurable, agreed and achievable, realistic and timed (Rogers & Badham, 1992). None of these features can be safely overlooked.

A target needs to be specific and timed so that all concerned share a common understanding of what they are seeking to achieve and by when. Such clarity is needed to underpin the detailed action plans that will lead to improvement.

Targets need to be realistic by being securely based on evidence about what current levels of achievement are and what rate of improvement is reasonable. Targets must also be achievable in the sense that those charged with the work should have the capability and resources needed to reach those targets. If a target looks seriously unattainable, it is unlikely to motivate and or to be taken seriously.

Targets have to be measurable in two senses. First it has to be clear what would count as valid and reliable evidence of success; and secondly it is necessary that collecting such data is manageable – the effort of collection must be in proportion to the value of collecting it and not disrupt the main business of educating the learners.

This ideal state of affairs is at least potentially achievable at local level – within a school or college or for individual learners and teachers. It is a much more challenging matter to set effective targets to promote improvement on a larger scale, for example at national or international level. These challenges arise in part because of the difficulty of retaining fitness for purpose on a larger scale: a specific target that is entirely appropriate for promoting improvement in one situation may be inappropriate for another. However a major challenge also arises because targets are not used solely to promote improvement but to prove it, i.e. they are used for purpose of accountability. Being accountable – to the local community, to the national government and indeed to the European Community – is an important feature of our democratic systems. Nevertheless, the ways in which such accountability is to be demonstrated need to be designed and managed with great care to avoid counter-productive behaviours.

Some problems with targets

Let us consider some examples of problems that can arise, in particular at national level: the "averages" problem, the "comparable data" problem, the "perverse effect" problem and the "undue influence" problem.

The "averages" problem

Suppose a government sets a national target that a certain percentage of 14 year-olds should reach a specified national standard by a given date. For the government, the target represents an average figure for the nation. But averages may be irrelevant to individual schools. Such a target may be completely trivial for a school that is already functioning at or above that level, but seem out of reach in one whose current performance is well below that level. For a target to be effective, it has to be meaningful for those who have direct responsibility for taking the action needed to improve on current performance.

The "averages" problem is not insurmountable. For example, governments can set target ranges (e.g. all schools to ensure that between 80 and 85% of 14 year-olds reach the specified national standard by 2004) (The National Assembly for Wales, 2000). This is conceptually less easy to grasp than a single figure target, but it can have much more meaning for the schools concerned, and is therefore more likely to be effective – providing of course that schools see the targets as worthwhile and not merely as something imposed by central government.

The "comparable data" problem

In collecting data and reporting measures of success, it is important to compare "like with like", or the conclusions that are drawn may be misleading. Many schools working in deprived areas have argued that it is inappropriate to judge their performance by drawing direct comparisons between their pupils' achievements and those of schools whose pupils are largely drawn from middle-class families.

To help ameliorate this problem, measures of "added value" are sometimes used. For example, ACCAC runs a system called *The School Improvement Index* (ACCAC, 2002). This is a yearly award based on measuring the average improvement in a school's examination performance over the preceding three years. Every school that enrols for the scheme receives a free analysis of its examinations data for management purposes, and the most improved schools, nationally and

regionally, receive awards. The schools that win these awards are delighted and proud to have public recognition, based on an objectively measured scheme, for their success in improving the education of their pupils. They are characteristically not those schools whose absolute performance comes out best.

The Welsh Assembly Government also publishes benchmark tables (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002) that use the percentage of free school meals to define "bands" within which each school can locate itself. A school can then compare its performance with other schools whose pupils come from comparable social backgrounds.

The "perverse effect" problem

There is a very real danger that public accountability based on performance measures can lead to some rather perverse effects. Take, for example, an intrinsic problem associated with all measures of success, namely that those not achieving the national targets risk being branded as failures. Far from motivating them to make greater efforts, such low status in their own eyes, those of their peers and of society can reinforce a cycle of failure.

Moreover, the pressure on schools to succeed in terms of some very specific performance measures may lead them to concentrate their efforts on those learners who are close to reaching the required target, possibly at the expense of less able pupils. Performance measures need to be very sensitive to such unwanted outcomes.

Another example of such "perverse" effects can arise when reputation, funding or pay are linked closely to performance against targets - and the stakes may be quite high. We should not be surprised therefore if those whose performance is being judged take steps to ensure that their performance appears as favourable as possible. Indeed, they may seek to manipulate statistics to demonstrate what they want the figures to show. For example, the purpose of a particular nationally set target might have been to improve the educational achievements of all pupils. However, a highly competitive school might deny lower performing pupils access to post-16 education at that school because this could have a negative effect on the school's overall performance ratings. Far from helping the pupil improve his or her performance, the target has had the perverse effect of denying him or her access!

The "undue influence" problem

By their nature, targets should be few in number. They cannot and should not encompass everything that schools and colleges do. However, performance against these targets can acquire very high status so that some schools and colleges may devote an undue proportion of time and resources to improving this area of their performance at the expense of other aspects of their work. In primary education in Wales, as part of the statutory assessment arrangements, we test pupils in core subjects (English, Maths, Welsh and Science) at 11. The performance of pupils in these tests may be seen as a reflection of the quality of education in that school. As a result, some schools may focus heavily on "teaching to the tests" at the expense of other areas of the curriculum (Estyn, 2003). At worst, it means that for some pupils, their last six or seven months of primary education may be focused largely on language, maths and science, including many practice tests, until they sit the national tests in May. The rest of the curriculum then becomes squeezed into June and July. What is doubly sad is that inspection evidence generally shows us that such practice does not lead to excellence - far from it. Schools with a much more balanced and varied curriculum do better for their pupils.

All of this does not mean that we should avoid setting targets. It does mean however that we need to analyse risks and benefits very carefully before setting targets. Targetry's twin functions – improvement and accountability - can pull in contrary directions. When setting national targets and designing systems for data collection and reporting, governments need to take particular care that the goals that they seek to promote through these targets are not in practice going to be undermined by them. They also need to ensure that the data collection systems to be used are fit for purpose and that the costs of implementing the data collection, in terms of the time and money spent, are justified through the gains to learners and the nation.

Targets and benchmarks for EC countries

Let us use this kind of analysis to evaluate critically the European Commission proposed benchmarks against three key questions:

- Are they likely to support improvement in individual member countries?
- Are they set up so that countries collect and report on their performances in ways that are comparable, meaningful and provide real measures of progress?
- What are the potential risks associated with them?

Are the benchmarks likely to support improvement?

The analysis above argues that targets work best where there is assent and where those targets are "smart".

The Commission has proposed that an Open Method of Coordination will be applied, using indicators to measure progress, benchmarks to set concrete goals and exchange of experience and peer reviews to learn form good practice (Commission of the European Communities, 2002). Within such a system, the criterion of assent is fundamental and presupposes reporting on improvements against specific targets towards which each country is pro-actively working. The specific benchmarks suggested by the European Commission do not self-evidently pass that test for Wales. Although our national priorities are broadly similar, our specific targets are not exactly the same as those proposed by the European Commission. The detail in the European Commission's targets may therefore have only a limited value in helping us improve.

Let us turn to analysing whether the benchmarks are "smart". As all five have a similar format, we shall take one example as representative to illustrate the analysis, viz:
"By 2010, all member states should at least halve the rate of early school leavers, with reference to the rate recorded in the year 2000, in order to achieve an EU-average rate of 10% or less."

There is no doubt that this target is specific and timed. Subject to an agreed common definition of what exactly is being measured (which has been established), it is potentially measurable. However, it is worth noting that not all member countries appear to measure it currently, or at least not in comparable ways, and that base-line data are not available for all member states. This raises an issue of potential manageability, as this may indicate that at least some countries would need to set up additional data collection systems to be able to report on this benchmark. The lack of base-line data also makes it hard to assess whether this target is achievable or realistic for those countries. However, those figures that are available for other countries (for the period 1992-2001) do not inspire confidence that halving "early leaver" rates is a realistic target. Only one county has achieved that rate of improvement over a ten year period; and although there appears to be a downward trend across Europe as a whole, a marked acceleration would seem necessary to meet the below 10% aspiration (Commission of the European Communities, 2002).

Are the benchmarks set up to provide comparable and meaningful data?

Let us consider a different benchmark for the purpose of this analysis, viz:
"By 2010, the percentage of low achieving 15 year-olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy will be at least halved in each member state."

This measure is currently obtained through OECD/PISA studies. However, within Wales we use a "core subject indicator", which we measure for 15 year-olds according to their General Certificate of Secondary Education grades (C or better in English/Welsh, Maths and Science) (Commission of the European Communities, 2002). It is not clear how we should compare that indicator with one based on the OECD/PISA studies. Should we count all the 15 year-olds who do not get C or better in these core subjects as "low achieving" in the EC sense? Is this broadly equivalent to the way in which other countries are interpreting the target?

It is a huge challenge to harmonise, in a meaningful way, statistical data collected for different purposes and in different ways across several countries. Inevitably, member states will have their own systems. At the very least, there needs to be clarity about what we are measuring and reporting against if we are to have faith in comparability of such measures. One means of ensuring truly comparable data may be to set up special "neutral" measures that are applied over and above the "normal" data collection systems within member states. However, that carries two serious disadvantages. The first is in terms of cost and manageability – are such additional measures justified by the benefits they bring? The second problem is lack of transparency as the relationship between pan-European and national measures may be very hard to understand.

What are the potential risks associated with these benchmarks?

Possibly the greatest single risk associated with these benchmarks is that they may not themselves prove to be key drivers for improvement. Movement towards the strategic vision may, in practice, be more effectively driven by locally determined strategies than by these five benchmarks. If that were so, then it would be hard to justify the cost and effort put into the programme. Secondly, the technical challenge of

defining meaningful measures and collecting comparable data, while simultaneously allowing for diversity between countries, may prove intractable. Greater cohesion that we currently have may prove to be a necessary precondition for developing and implementing effective Europe-wide benchmarks. Ironically, however, if these benchmarks were to become high status drivers for change, they would then be subject to risks of the kind that have dogged performance national performance measures such as "perverse" or "undue influence" effects!

Summary and conclusions

This chapter has sought to analyse the features of effective targets and to illustrate some of the risks associated with using them, by drawing on the experience of using target-setting and benchmarking to improve school performance in Wales. It recognises that accountability is entirely appropriate within a democratic education system, but illustrates some of the tensions that can arise in seeking to use benchmarks and targets both to prove and improve performance. It moves on to illustrate how that kind of analysis can be applied to pan-European benchmarks.

This analysis suggests that the specific European level benchmarks proposed by the European Commission may currently prove to be of only limited value to Wales. Similar considerations may apply to other countries.

However, that is not to conclude that pan-European benchmarks are in principle invalid and a costly irrelevance. The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales has set us the goal of having one of the best education and lifelong learning systems in the world, with challenging targets to meet and a clear vision of what we need to do to reach those targets locally and nationally (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002). We do need means of measuring our own progress and comparing it with that made in other countries. Such tools can be powerful aids to development and to combat unwarranted complacency.

Many of the difficulties that this paper illustrates arise precisely because of the diversity between different countries. While convergence at the level of general aims may be achievable, specific common targets or benchmarks may be a step too far at present. However, the work programme on future objectives in education and training gives scope to test out the extent to which the general methodology and the five proposed specific benchmarks prove to be effective, and to build on the

lessons learned for the future. It is hoped that this brief analysis may contribute towards that debate.

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Reflections on the five priority benchmarks

Tom Leney

Abstract/Overview

Working together, the member states of the European Union and the European Commission have recently identified five priority benchmarks for education and training in Europe. One approach to reflecting on these benchmarks would be to predict how the process will impact on the national and local systems across Europe and, in particular, on lifelong and life-wide learners. However, at this stage in the new process this would be premature. It is too early to know how the process will impact on policy and practice in the member states, and too early to be sure as to the character of the policy process that will eventually become institutionalised at European level.

On the other hand it is arguably the case that we do not yet have a common set of ideas to help to think about how the implementation of the OMC (Open Method of Coordination) process may impact on education and training systems through the identification of these priority benchmarks and the associated initiatives now being started.

Therefore, this paper attempts to make some contribution to clarifying ideas for thinking through in a reasonably systematic way how the identification and pursuit of the prioritised benchmarks for education and training may impact through OMC. Making reference to studies of the benchmarking processes used in the European Union's monetary and employment fields helps in this respect, because more analysis has been undertaken of OMC as a policy mechanism in these fields, than in education and training.

The chapter is organised around a number of questions concerning the identification of the five key priorities. How did we get here? Where are we now? What is the significance of the particular benchmarks? Is there a roadmap? And, what may be the plausible outcomes of this ambitious European project?

Introduction

Whatever the outcome may prove to be, European-level policy making for education and training is now moving into a new phase. The widely publicised agreements reached in Lisbon and since have identified ambitious objectives, and also provide a legal and legitimising context for the application of the process known as OMC (the Open Method of Coordination) to member states' education and training systems. Although the method has been developed and used for the last few years in European economic and employment policy, its application to education and training fields is novel. Thus, the identification of five priority benchmarks among a wider range of objectives for education and training in European countries is also new, as is the setting up of a system of coordinating committees at the European level, in which national governments and other identified European policy players will all have a role.

At this early stage there are probably two ways to reflect on the priority benchmarks that have been identified. The first would be to take the benchmarks one-by-one and try to identify the most likely outcomes of the European-level policy intervention. But OMC is still a very "young" policy approach, and without impact data and other information to work with, anticipating the outcome on education and training provision and on people's lifelong learning would not be much more than guesswork.

The second approach is to recognise that as yet little is known about the development of OMC in the field of education and training. So far only a small number of players are involved directly in the process, probably little more than a handful in each of the member states. OMC applied to education and training policies is at an early stage. It is not widely known about, and is little covered in the press. OMC is still something of a secret garden. This suggests that it could be useful to try to conceptualise how to think about the prioritisation and benchmarking process for education and training systems, rather than anticipate outcomes when these as yet are anything but clear.

This chapter takes the latter approach. The starting point is that the education and training communities do not yet have a common language to think through the implications of the adaptation of OMC to the five (by implication, six) priority benchmarks for education and training. Few key players, in fact, could now describe what OMC or the five priority benchmarks for education and training are. It helps us, therefore, that in-

depth analysis of the OMC process in European fiscal and employment policy has been carried out. Studies from these fields provide some helpful concepts, frameworks and metaphors as we think through the potential ramifications of the agreed priorities, and this paper draws on these studies.

After stating what the identified priority benchmarks are, the sections in this chapter address the following questions:
- How did we get here?
- How should we conceptualise the Open Method of Coordination?
- In practical terms, what can we say about the priority benchmarks?
- What are the plausible scenarios and outcomes?

A starting point is to recognise that the application of the Open Method of Coordination to the fields of education and training is not a freestanding exercise. The method of active coordination has already been used in regard to both economic and employment policies of member states. The five priority benchmarks, or objectives, are situated within the OMC methodology, and are best understood in the context of the European Union's antecedent economic and employment policies. Similarly, we can learn something about how OMC as a vehicle may take the objectives forward, by looking at the ways in which the methodology has worked in the economic and employment fields.

The five priority benchmarks for education and training

In November 2002 the European Commission and the members states announced that in response to the challenges set by the Lisbon European Council joint objectives for education and training were being identified, and that five priority benchmarks had been agreed (European Commission, 2002). The five priority benchmarks stipulate that by 2010:
- all member states should at least halve the rate of early school leavers with reference to the year 2000, in order to achieve an EU average of 10% or less;
- all member states will have at least halved the level of gender imbalance among graduates in mathematics, science and technology, while securing a significant overall increase in the total number of graduates (base year 2000);
- member states should ensure that the average percentage of 25-29 year-olds with at least an upper secondary education reaches 80% or more;

- the percentage of low achieving 15 year-olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy will be halved at least in each member state;
- the EU average level of participation in lifelong learning should be at least 15% of the adult population aged 25 to 65, and in no country should it be lower than 10%.

A sixth benchmark is implicit: the Commission "invited" member states to contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives by setting national benchmarks for substantial increases in per capita investment in human resources, although no specific objectives were set.

How did we get here?

The policy vehicle for steering and achieving the objectives agreed between the member states' governments and the Commission in consequence of the Lisbon process is the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC processes of setting benchmarks, benchmarking, peer review and sharing best practice – all within the European Union's legal framework of subsidiarity for member states' education and training systems – is described in more detail in other contributions to this yearbook (for example by Gaby Hostens).

There is a strong link with the European economic and employment strategy, and this runs down two tracks. The first is the substantive link between the EU's economic policy and the priority benchmarks for education and training. The second is the adoption of the same method (OMC) in the attempt to secure objectives for economic, employment and education policies. We can trace these in turn.

Comparing the ambition that was articulated in the Lisbon Agreement (European Council, 2000) for Europe to become the world's leading knowledge-based economy and the content of the five priority benchmarks for education and training shows how closely the education and training objectives are derived from the economic goals. The education and training priorities outlined above emphasise the need to achieve rapid increases in the number of high-quality graduates in scientific and related areas, to make graduation from initial education at

ISCED[1] level 3 (as a minimum) the European norm, to tackle seriously current numbers of early school leavers and those with poor basic skills, and to ensure that large numbers of people are engaging in lifelong learning in the workplace or elsewhere at any one time.

As everyone now knows, the Lisbon vision for Europe's economic future identifies several linked ambitions for the future. These are to achieve:
- competitiveness;
- a dynamic knowledge-based economy;
- rapid and sustainable growth;
- more and better jobs;
- social cohesion.

Investing in and shaping Europe's human resource is seen as a high priority and a necessary (if not sufficient) pre-condition for achieving these broader aims. So it is not difficult to see how the key benchmarks for education and training with their emphasis on science, technology and mathematics, on making participation at ISCED level 3 the norm, on tackling low skills and raising levels of adult participation in leaning fit closely with this economic vision.

Speakers from the European Commission or from the European Parliament often treat the European employment strategy and its apparent success in the growth years at the very end of the 20th century as an intermediate variable between improvements in education and training systems and the achievement of the economic gaols. Reference is made to the rapid growth in the number of jobs at the turn of the century, the role of governments, companies and individuals in improving education and skills attainment levels, the rapid increase in the use of new technologies in the workplaces, increasing flexibility in employment and the decline of low skilled jobs in many sectors, particularly manufacturing.

Two questions about this "straight line" trajectory are often asked. What may be the impact of increasing the size of the EU from 15 to 25 then 27 or so member states? And, is there a demonstrably clear causal link between improving the supply side of human capital and achieving the economic goals that have been articulated? The first of these issues lies largely outside the scope of this book, but the second is of real interest.

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[1] International Standard Classification of Education

Since developing the human resource is central to the economic platform that the European Union has identified, the answer to this question will hold the key. In the UK at least, there is a long-standing debate about the extent to which boosting the supply side of skills through education and training achievement and skills can of itself drive up productivity and competitiveness. The debate has been fuelled recently by an account that is sceptical at least in part about the economic benefits of learning (Wolf, 2002) so far as individuals and societies are concerned.

If similar debates are being conducted by economists and educationalists in other countries, then the outcome of an international study that was recently carried out under the wing of the European Commission will offer support, at least, to the position adopted by the EU in linking education and training, employment and the achievement of the economic vision. Academics from Barcelona commissioned by Fondirigenti and Confindustria, the Italian national employers' organisation and supported by the European Commission, conducted a major review of research and literature across Europe and the OECD to examine and reach conclusions about the link between investment in educating and training – developing the human resource - and achieving competitiveness in the globalised knowledge economy (De la Fuente, 2003). The study calculates that returns vary somewhat from one member state to another, but that the conclusions to be reached are clear, namely:

- investment in human capital contributes significantly to growth;
- there is clear evidence that human capital plays a key role in fostering technological change and diffusion;
- human capital investment is attractive relative to alternative assets from the individual and societal perspective;
- policies that raise the quantity and quality of the stock of human resource capital are compatible with increasing social cohesion.

The overall conclusion of the study is that in a context of rapid technological change the Lisbon strategy of investing in and developing the human resources is likely to succeed. The findings are likely to be the subject of critical debate among specialists as the text becomes more widely know. Nevertheless, the study's optimistic conclusions demonstrate well the thinking about cause and effect that lie behind the linkage of education and training, employment and economic outcomes that are at the heart of the process that has developed through the Lisbon and other recent EU Presidency conferences. In this light, the link between the EU's adopted vision for economic growth and

competitiveness, employment strategy and the identified priority benchmarks for education and training could not be clearer.

How to understand the OMC process?

The second connection between the EU's economic and employment strategies and the developing education and training strategies is to be found in the use of OMC. It is a methodology that originates from initiatives taken collaboratively by member states' prime ministers and governments and coordinated by the Commission. Member states have sought measures and processes that would both respect the principles of subsidiarity and encourage close cooperation, while the Commission sought a legitimate role that would not be construed as too heavy-handed at a time when EU decisions often appeared distant from the European citizens, bureaucratic and lacking in democratic legitimacy.

Different variants of the methodology have operated in the spheres of the fiscal and economic policy and employment, and this variety can help us to think through how OMC may apply to education and training policies, once the model has bedded in. In addition, considerable analysis has been undertaken of OMC as a policy tool in the economic and employment policy fields. Several of the leading analysts worked together recently to produce a "state of the art" report on EU governance (Hartwig et al., 2002). The remaining part of this section draws heavily on the report drawn up by Ines Hartwig and her colleagues from the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Germany. The report suggests a number of perspectives on OMC (Hartwig et al., op. cit., pp 5-23).

OMC is a "new game" and relies on legitimising and regulatory measures to set up an unprecedented institutional structure at the European level. It is a form of multi-level governance that (at least at the inception) allows EU heads of state and governments to take on active leadership of the Union through a model based on persuasion. A whole range of players is involved, with a larger role for the social partners than is the case domestically in parts of the EU. The Commission has a coordination role, which may or may not expand as time goes by.

Two forms of OMC are already visible. EU fiscal policy has meant "hard coordination". States had no access to monetary union until they met the stipulated conditions, after which (as in the case of Ireland) the threat of sanctions remained a possibility. On the other hand, the "soft

coordination" model used in the EU employment strategy carries no direct power of coercion or sanction, but relies instead on the process of peer and best practice reviews. In other words, the soft variant relies on the goodwill of the actors. Even so, the capacity of the method to put pressure on states that perform more poorly than expected can be seen, by analogy, in the post-PISA experience of some countries. This process can be described as "naming and shaming".

A number of drivers and factors are likely to have an impact on the way that OMC operates. This is the case in particular when a new policy area such as education and training with the identified priorities comes within the process. Hartwig et al. (op. cit., p. 11) suggest that a useful way to understand the dynamics of OMC hinges on how strong or weak the participation of the key players is at the national and European level. We can visualise the alternatives as types, shown in the table below.

Table: Possible outcomes of OMC

		Players operating at the European level	
		Strong	Weak
Players operating at the national government level	Strong	**Two–level corporatism**	**National players dominate**
	Weak	**European players dominate**	**Slow moving**

Source: Adapted from Hartwig et al., op. cit. p. 11

Ines Hartwig and her colleagues identify the key question as a simple one: Does the cooperation lead to anything? (Hartwig et al., op. cit., p. 17). OMC as a methodology presupposes that the key participants at the different levels intend to participate cooperatively through problem-solving and consensus building activities. From the table above we can see how the OMC process could lead to different outcomes according to the circumstances. In terms of process this could range from fusion to fragmentation.

In terms of impact the range is from positive through neutral to negative. We can anticipate that one problem in assessing the impact of OMC to the education and training priorities will be to identify the effects that OMC has had, as compared to changes that would have taken place anyway. Hartwig et al. (op. cit., p. 18) suggest that the OMC applied to employment policies has numerous problems of implementation. This

includes a lack of appropriate indicators and the fact that the employment plans submitted to the Commission are by and large a reiteration of existing national programmes, suggesting that the dynamic influence of OMC has been limited.

The implication is that it will take several years of the operation of the softer form of OMC in the context of the prioritised education and training benchmarks before the impact can be identified, in terms of both process and outcome.

Where are we now?

Although it is too early to reach conclusions about the outcomes of OMC applied to the five priority benchmarks for education and training, it is worth identifying some of the opportunities and difficulties that may be associated with each.

Benchmark 1

Halve at least the rate of early school leavers, to achieve an EU average of 10% or less.

The definition of this benchmark appears to lack clarity. Nevertheless, achieving this target implies far more concentrated and extensive action for some member states than others. The data provided by Eurostat and CEDEFOP on young people's transitions indicate the wide variation in staying on rates in education and initial training. On the one hand a grouping of countries that includes the Nordic member states, Germany and France and the economically less advanced members such as Greece and Portugal. The UK is in an anomalous position here: while early drop out fell rapidly through the 1980s until the mid 1990s. Factors such as the availability of short-term, low-skill jobs on the youth labour market mean that early school leaving remains a persistent pattern and issue in some countries.

Across the EU, the percentage of 15 and 16 year-olds outside education and training varies from virtually 0% to approximately 10% (Eurostat and CEDEFOP, 2001, p. 103).

Actions implied will clearly relate back to the quality and motivational aspects of basic schooling in the compulsory phase. The emerging emphasis may be on high quality basic schooling for all (entitlement;

comprehensive approaches) or a move towards more individualisation and choice for the learner (negotiated programmes of study; new links between school and the community/industry; alternative non-school pathways).

OMC may create an open atmosphere of experimentation as different countries pilot different approaches. Alternatively, OMC may promote a preferred vehicle or solution, with "lagging" countries anxious that problems that have proved difficult to resolve in youth transitions for a variety of economic and social reasons may remain intractable. For some countries this target will be tough with a target date of 2010.

Benchmark 2

Halve the gender imbalance among graduates in mathematics, science and technology, while securing a significant overall increase in the total number of graduates.

The first and most striking point is the extent to which the post second war era began with university graduation by males dominating the rate of graduation by females, yet the century ended with a ratio of female: male graduation that has set up the 21st century as an era of higher education in which female graduates will dominate. With two exceptions, the proportion of female graduates to males tips strongly in favour of females across both the EU and the future member states, This trend accelerated through the 1990s, such that in five EU member states and in most of the future member states the number of women graduates exceeds males by 25% or more (Eurostat, 2002, p. 101). In turn, this reflects the patterns of upper secondary (ISCED 3) graduation (Eurostat, 2002, p. 93). Increasing the total number of graduates implies setting up structures and processes in most countries to motivate males to participate more strongly in higher education, unless the overall gender balance is to increase.

So far as maths, science and technology graduates are concerned, the position differs, though not to the same extent in all countries. The most extreme differences are in technological specialisations such as engineering and manufacturing, where only about 18-25% of students are female in most countries, and in science, maths and computing, where women in EU members states only occupy 20-40% of the places and only Italy now achieves parity (Eurostat, 2002, p. 110). In these faculties, higher education predominantly attracts males as they graduate towards professions that have traditionally been male dominated.

Tackling this issue implies countering some of the socially reinforced gender-bound patters of socialisation in the home, school, community and society, as well as adjusting the curriculum of schools to encourage more female specialisation in these areas at tertiary level. Guidance systems have an important role.

As I have indicated, the associated objective is to raise levels of tertiary graduation overall. This has certainly been happening in both the binary and unified systems of higher education of different member states. However, funding and quality issues are likely to dominate the further expansion of higher education, with tensions and fierce competition dominating the quest by universities for new funding to meet higher expectations in terms of numbers of graduates. Some states may emphasise the economic benefits of learning to the individual and seek to devolve more of the costs to families. Others may place the emphasis on social capital and the economic returns in terms of competitiveness, and seek to increase public or private/public partnership funding contributions. As already stated, all are likely to have to balance different funding priorities. It is partly for this reason that short courses and shorter degree courses attract governments' interest. Added to this, demographic and labour market trends ma make it more difficult to find enough lecturers in some subjects.

Benchmark 3
Achieve an average of at least 80% of 25-29 year-olds with at least an upper secondary education.

Similar to the position with early leaving, the current performance of EU member states varies from high levels of participation to much lower. France, for example, has achieved the presidential goal of 80% of young people participating in courses at baccalaureate level already. While PISA results may have disappointed Germany, it does appear that by the age of 29 the defined proportion of young Germans have achieved the target set out, partly due to the initial and continuing qualifications system that is embedded in the Dual System. On average some 75% of 22 year-olds in EU member states have now achieved an ISCED Level 3 qualification (Euronet, 2002, p. 93), so this benchmark may not be too hard to achieve by the end of the decade at European level. Nevertheless, reaching this level in particular countries, notably Portugal and perhaps the UK, Italy and Spain may prove to be tough. An additional factor is the under-performance of boys compared to girls (see Euronet, 2002, p. 92): if it proves difficult to re-engage boys, then even modest improvements in

countries with relatively high levels of performance in relation to this benchmark may not be easy. It is also interesting to note that the average level of young people achieving upper secondary level qualifications across the future member states is higher now than the current EU average.

Some of the EU systems are dominated by general education pathways at ISCED level 3, some have school-based vocational pathways, and some have work-based vocational pathways. The general school/vocational school split is common to most of the future member states. This target will be an easy one for some states, tough for others. Given the embedded position of upper secondary pathways in each country's social fabric, the policy effort at the European level is likely to concentrate on outcomes rather than a convergence of structures. Accession of the new member states will "help" the European level statistics here; but achieving the target everywhere will remain difficult. The lifelong learning policies will have to be aware of this, and play a strategic role for 19-29 year-olds, at least in some countries.

Benchmark 4
Halve (at least) the percentage of low achieving 15 year-olds in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy in each member state.

Although the OECD does not have the governance role that the EU has, and could not develop its own version of OMC, we can see how powerful the tool of compare and contrast (earlier referred to as name and shame) can now be in the field of international comparative outcome studies. As a result of the PISA study (OECD, 2001), for example, a major debate has been generated in Germany to identify changes that may be needed in states' systems. Similarly, Norway, aware that the country would appear further down the table of results from the recent PIRLS reading tests on 9 year-olds than expected (Twist et al., 2003), broke the press embargo on the results so as to soften the political fallout.

This target implies the generation of changes to curriculum or pedagogy in national systems, and that each member state must take action. We can expect that this may start at earlier stages in the young learner's career and also with "wraparound" schemes that can identify and take early action particularly with target groups and neighbourhoods with high indices of exclusion. For this reason, particular disadvantaged groups are identified in several member states and innovative actions taken to attempt to tackle this issue.

In this respect, all member states will probably see this as a difficult target to reach, though the gap to be bridged is much bigger in some countries than others. We can anticipate that this benchmark may offer the opportunity to compare teaching and learning as well as management approaches adopted in different countries. Peer review and sharing of good practice could be a lively issue in regard to this benchmark, and could reach into a level of pedagogic practice that has often evaded research and collaboration at the European level.

Benchmark 5
Achieve an EU average level of lifelong learning participation of at least 15% of adults aged 25 to 65, with no country showing participation rates lower than 10%.

Participation in lifelong learning is better recorded now than was the case a decade ago, but reliable and comparable statistics are still hard to find. Furthermore, unlike schooling and higher education systems, policies for lifelong and life-wide learning in the member states are still in formation, and contested.

Definitions, aspirations and difficulties of accurate measurement are likely to dominate the work on this benchmark. Debates and different approaches are likely to continue, but are unlikely to be brought to fruition by 2010. We can expect that a variant of this objective will appear in the "second generation" of benchmarks that will follow the round that has recently begun.

(Implied) Benchmark 6
States to set national benchmarks for substantial increases in capita investment in human resources.

The statement of the five priority benchmarks (European Commission, 2002) implies a sixth, underlying benchmark. Member states are encouraged to achieve higher levels of investment in education and training. How this is to be done is not referred to in the addendum statement to the five priority benchmarks. In this sensitive area subsidiarity is respected, even to the extent that no clear benchmark is set. However, the disparities between the average EU public spending level on education (5%) is contrasted to the percentage spent by the tree "best performing" countries – Sweden, Finland and France – at an average of 7.4%. A push is implied.

The logic behind the linkage of economic, employment and education and training performance that the EU's leadership has adopted was pointed up in an earlier part of this chapter. How the OMC applied to education and training priorities treats this implicit priority will make a good test case as the method develops in practice.

Is there a road map, and where are we going?

Three general observations are worth bearing in mind.

Firstly, the objectives are boldly stated, but a limitation is that they seem to have as their focus of attention the 15 member states of the EU, as it is constituted before expansion. This ignores, at least to some extent, the expansion of the EU to 25 members in the spring of 2004 with the accession of the ten future member states, and most likely at least two further members quite soon afterwards. The framing of some of the key benchmarks for Europe may need revision to take account of the expansion, otherwise there is a risk of two sets of targets or a diminution of the unifying aspect of OMC.

Secondly, while all the priority benchmarks are concerned with participation in education, training and lifelong learning, none pay any attention to the more complex questions of quality of the learning experience, nor to quality control.

Thirdly, the priority benchmarks in conjunction with the OMC as a methodology are clearly a convergent tool for policy. However, as an earlier research study for the European Commission on trends in education and training showed, issues of convergence are complex (Green et al., 1999). Even movement along a common trajectory may not lead to convergence, if those further along the continuum are advancing faster than those further behind. This could well happen as concerns participation in higher education or in lifelong learning. Furthermore, so far as concerns structures of education and the arrangements that mediate young people's transition from schooling to the labour markets, European societies tend to have deeply embedded structures that are valued and not susceptible to rapid change. It is more likely that policy objectives show convergence over time in response to the external pressures of globalisation, technological change and, perhaps, the OMC. It is much less likely that institutional arrangements, for instance for

initial VET, across the cultural and geo-regions of Europe will show a strong trend of convergence.

Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see whether convergence develops in terms of some kind of core curriculum or standards for general education and vocational training, partly to assist the associated drive for recognition of qualifications across Europe, and partly to facilitate portable elements of credit in recognition of qualifications or acquired competences. Such a development would be difficult to imagine as an outcome of a totally voluntary system of coordination. It could imply a scenario in which the European Commission assumed stronger powers than facilitating and coordinating, implying in turn a shift away from the principle of subsidiarity towards the hard form of coordination referred to earlier in this chapter.

However, as this chapter began by asserting, it is too soon yet to anticipate how the OMC applied to the priority benchmarks - and, for that matter, to Europe's systems of education and training as a whole - will turn out. Nor can we anticipate the point on the spectrum between fusion and fragmentation where a "settlement" will be reached.

More usefully, we can now identify concepts and ideas that will help to understand the national and European aspects of the Open Method of Coordination as it is applied to the education and training benchmarks. The rules of the game will develop as it is played, at both the policy level of the member states and at European level. OMC and its successive cycles of coordination may in principle be a convergent tool, but the outcomes will depend on the compact that develops between the national governments of the member states and the European Commission as the rules of the new "game" of OMC develop. The interventions of the range of actors who mediate between the national and European levels will also have a new influence.

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III   National perspectives

The implementation of indicators and benchmarks into the Greek educational system

Nicholas Iliadis

Introduction

This article attempts to present a picture of educational policies as well as of the degree of integration of objectives for education determined at European Union level, in Greece.

Statistical data of the Greek educational system and its numerical characteristics are scattered, without elaboration, difficult to find and in some cases in contradiction with its own findings (Centre of Educational Research, 2002). In spite of radical changes in several aspects of Greek society, expected during the coming years as a result of the creation of the unified European market, no unified strategy regarding basic and lifelong education and training has yet been formed, and their importance as a basic element in the present-day production process has not yet been perceived in society as well as within the educational community. The Greek education system has a strong academic orientation. Compulsory education lacks educational elements, which would prepare students for real life situations. Initial education and training is insufficient and not organized in a way that would lead smoothly to continuing and supplementary education and training in accordance with the rapid developments in the Greek and European market.

There is no mechanism for anticipating the needs of the economy with regard to specialization of the labour force, and none for planning steps aimed at dealing with those needs in the framework of the rapid rate of change expected to take place in the unified European market.

In a European symposium for Open and Distance Learning (Pedagogical Institute, 1996), educational officials were declaring: *"It is well known that knowledge must be updated on average every 10 years, while studies show that 2/3 of the working places in Europe demand a kind of tertiary education. These facts give an indication of the needs of the educational system and of continuing vocational training. The question is if our educational system is able to face these contemporary needs.*

Unfortunately the answer is no, while our European experiences show that they have contributed towards these directions".

According to the Centre of Educational Research (The Greek Educational System, 2002): *"If someone tries a first evaluation of the content of this publication, it is possible to conclude on the base of the presentation and the variety of the educational activities included, that the Greek Educational system is impressive in terms of the quantity and the variety of its activities. It would be difficult not to conclude that the Greek educational system is a complete and multi-dimensional system. This statement creates different types of comments and disputes, which are not accidental or unjustifiable. It is also not accidental that we are making reference to activities and not to results. We do not have mechanisms to control the quality as well as the results with general societal and professional recognition and acceptance. It is almost impossible for someone to know in a substantial and persuasive way what really exists behind the fascinating initial picture".*

In general, the economic structure in Greece was formed in such a way that production was not linked to the educational structure. Job positions offered today by the state and private enterprises are insufficient to absorb the population either of young graduates or of young people of lower educational levels in a way that contributes to the growth of productivity.

As a consequence, many young people accept jobs that seem inferior to their formal qualifications, and yet these same qualifications provided by the educational system cannot be adapted to the labour market, nor are they linked to demand.

Despite the rapid technological developments of our times and the restructuring of production in Europe dealing with international competition, Greece is having difficulty in putting modern educational and techno-productive models into practice and in following current developments. In addition to a shortage of current specialties, there is an inability to develop necessary skills of a general nature, such as the ability to ensure quality, to solve problems, to learn, to be flexible and to communicate.

No determination is made either of the needs that the objectives of the educational programmes must meet, or of the criteria for measuring the degree to which objectives have been met, and the extent to which investment in a particular programme has paid off. Efforts are necessary to coordinate, control and determine educational policies relative to education in conjunction with economic priorities. The determination of a European framework of educational objectives, indicators and

benchmarks, compatible with the needs in contemporary world, is very helpful for the Greek educational system.

The usefulness of measurement of learning outcomes

Measurement is the systematic assignment of numbers to objects or events, but it is more than mere addition and subtraction. It involves the comparison of something with a unit or standard amount or quantity of that same thing, in order to represent the magnitude of the variable being measured.

The application of measurement procedures allows us to discriminate between individuals and to describe individual differences in a number of different behaviours so that these may be interrelated in meaningful ways. The introduction of metrical terms allows for the application of many useful mathematical and statistical procedures to summarize larger number of observations. Evaluation describes a general process for making judgements and decisions, since it is the systematic collection, quantification, and ordering of information.

Most educators agree that measurement and evaluation are integral components of the instructional process. Progress towards the achievement of educational goals must be periodically evaluated, if effective teaching and learning are to be accomplished. Evaluation is effective as it provides evidence of the extent of the changes in students. Achievement in schools involves moving towards a specific set of objectives. In addition to identifying pupil progress, the diagnostic use of measurement data can be helpful. Evaluation can serve a valuable function by identifying the strengths and weaknesses in achievement of individual pupils or classes.

In developing methods to measure the extent of achievement directed behaviour, a specific detailed set of quality benchmarks and criteria must be formulated. Humankind has entered a period of considerable complexity in modern society that will not permit a random process of problem solving. Problems such as population growth, manpower needs, ecology, decreasing natural resources and haphazard application of scientific developments exist in plenty. There is a need for education to establish principles by which people can deliberately influence the shaping of their destiny.

A prominent educational need is to be found in the measurable discrepancy between current and desired or required outcomes. If policies satisfy certain agreed values and goals, the decisions made could be the means for furthering society's deepest needs rather than appearing to be

ends in themselves. Many of the problems faced today are a result of man's effort to improve one aspect of his life at the cost of another. These isolated improvements in the long run become part of the problem. The most revealing aspect of an educational process is the study of its objectives. They serve as guidelines to what is hoped to be accomplished. The educational activities are then selected for their ability to achieve the objectives.

Different philosophies are attempting to develop different types of human behaviour to a different type of social and economic environment. The European Union must develop a philosophy and framework, which indicates or reflects centrally agreed tendencies and values for European society as a whole facing the future within international globalisation. Benchmarks and criteria of educational programmes can serve for decisions on programme initiation and continuation, on programme modification, on programme support and the understanding of various processes. In addition they are a powerful force for improving educational activities including administration, curriculum development, counselling and supervision.

The Greek efforts

Greece is continuously attempting to improve and update the educational system in order to gain a suitable economic and social position within the European Union.

Education in Greece is closely related to grades and examinations rather than to a learning process. In addition, the educational system as well as the thinking of the people are oriented towards theoretical concepts rather than to the application of principles in real life situations.

The need for a pluralistic educational system, emphasizing learning for understanding and for application in a more pragmatic way, has become increasingly important for Greek society. This is important in order to improve efficiency, and develop a desirable flexibility as the contemporary situation demands, without damaging valuable cultural elements or devaluating the human aspects. Specific directions and policies regarding education according to contemporary needs as the European Union benchmarks and criteria are useful. However, the concepts must be applied according to the needs and characteristics of the Greek situation. In Greece education is administered at a national level. Responsibility for the education system is centralized. Central government has the responsibility and the authority for the total provision of the education service, for determining national policies and for planning the direction of the system as a whole. Higher education

institutions implement and administer the policies and also have their own statutory powers and responsibilities.

According to the Centre of Educational Research (The Greek Educational System, 2002): *"The organization of the Greek educational system is the same as the organization of the state. As a result the general structure of the system is formulated by the minister and also the educational offices at the various provinces and the schools"*.

The national curriculum defines the national educational entitlement of pupils at primary and secondary education. This applies to all pupils in state maintained schools. The content of each national curriculum subject is defined; each subject consists of common requirements, the programme of study and attainment targets.

The attainment targets do not define the expected standards of pupil performance in terms of level descriptions or end of key stage descriptions, and there are no standardized national tests. There is not a national framework of qualifications.

There is no evaluation system of the educational results in Greece, nor is there a teacher's evaluation system. The students are given exams at the end of each year of study on the subjects included in the curriculum.

The Pedagogical Institute is assigned directly to the minister of education and is responsible for monitoring, disseminating and reviewing the national curriculum and its core subjects.

Recently, the Institute has undertaken the following initiatives:

- the establishment of a new department at the Institution of Quality in Education whose mission is to contribute to the more effective realization of the aims and objectives of education
- the revision of syllabus content for compulsory education
- the development of innovative pilot project "Entrepreneurship for Youths"
- the development and application of a programme "Teacher training in utilizing information and Communication Technologies in Education"
- the promotion of activities for people with special educational needs
- the development of research activities.

All of these are compatible with European Union efforts to
- improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU
- facilitate the access to education and training systems
- open-up education and training systems to the wider world.

However, a lot of action must be taken within the Greek educational system if it is to effectively respond and support the knowledge based economy. Benchmarks and criteria on the part of the European Union can facilitate the application of suitable policies and eliminate conflicts within the Greek educational society. Crucial concepts such as mobility, lifelong learning, professional, vocational and higher education development, E-learning, transparency of qualifications, educational specifications, measurement of educational results and international cooperation, must be suitably introduced and further elaborated.

The relevance of education and training systems and institutions to contemporary demands of the knowledge based economy, compatibility with European educational and training systems allowing citizens to move between them, internationalisation of qualifications and standards in terms of knowledge and skills, lifelong learning processes, are all subjects towards which the Greek educational system must move as soon as possible. Benchmarks and criteria can be an instrument in the development of a coherent and comprehensive strategy in education and training, as a means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the EU goals.

European indicators and benchmarks in relation to Greek practices

Teachers and trainers

Teachers and trainers are key actors for stimulating the development of society and the economy. However, the majority of them come from university departments with studies relevant only to their specialties without suitable pedagogical studies or knowledge and skills to fulfil their changing roles in the knowledge based society. Lifelong learning processes are provided on a small scale and not in a systematic fashion. In addition, they are geared towards providing a basic pedagogical background, which they did not develop during their initial education, and not to adaptation to change. Teaching is not attractive in relation to salaries in order to secure a sufficient qualitative level of people entering the teaching profession, while most of the teachers and trainers entering the profession do not have professional experience in other fields. However, due to high rates of unemployment a lot of young university graduates consider the teaching profession as a good and secure solution, since teachers are public servants for life. Hence there is strong competition for entering the profession.

Only for primary school teachers regular university programmes exist for becoming a teacher. Secondary school teachers are university graduates of various specialties who manage to pass the appropriate exam.

It has not been widely realized that the concept of "pedagogics" in the various branches of teachers should be differentiated from pedagogical practice traditionally connected to education, in order to clarify the development of the role of the instructor's professional profile. There is no system of certification that would lead to recognition of certain occupational qualifications or occupational rights of teachers. In addition, the lack of a system for the measurement of qualitative specifications of teaching in Greece, deprives the teaching profession of the potential to demonstrate knowledge and skills, which could be widely recognized. They hardly contribute to the development of healthy incentives for teachers.

According to Kassotakis (1996): *"In our country the teacher's initial training and particularly that of the secondary school teachers are in a disappointing state of affairs, and the stiffness and rigidity as well as the practice of traditional "so called teachers training university departments", do not permit room for someone to be optimist that the situation will improve."*

Skills for the knowledge society

There are no procedures in action for measuring the quality of teaching as an essential criterion for the acquisition of key competencies necessary to the knowledge based society. Most of the schools do not operate in a way that allows the integration of ICT into the various subjects, while technology and the use of technology are not subjects with an appropriate status. Students are compelled to memorize things, while the "learning to learn" process is not a central part of the curriculum. Social skills, general culture, European dimension, entrepreneurship, none of these are principal elements of the programme. Traditional subjects like classics, mathematics, science, are the dominant elements of the curriculum. They are structured in a traditional way without any real connection as regards direct application towards the needs of the new society.

There are no statutory specifications with regard to curricula, material and technical infrastructure, safety regulations, teaching staff, monitoring systems etc. for the educational programmes.

The generally low operational level of the work environment in Greece does not demand high level knowledge and skills.

In the USA, the rate of unemployment among individuals with a low level of qualifications and education is six times greater than the rate of unemployment among individuals with a high level of qualifications and education. The high operating level of the economic and productive environment of that society has need of highly qualified individuals in order to function and maintain and increase its competitiveness. Free competition in the labour market decreases the employment of low qualifications personnel. (IRDAC, 1992).

Correspondingly, in the United Kingdom the rate of unemployment among individuals of low level education is four times greater than the unemployment rate among individuals of higher level education. Likewise, in Denmark the rate is 4.8 times greater, in Italy 1.8 times greater, and in Spain 1.3 times greater. In contrast, Greece's rate of unemployment among individuals with a low level of education is 0.8 times smaller than the corresponding unemployment rate among individuals with a high level of education.

The low operational level of the work environment in Greece is not able to absorb and fully benefit from productive individuals with a high level of education, while at the same time there are questions about the real value of this high level qualifications provided by the educational system for the real world of work.

This low operational level of the work environment in Greece in conjunction with the lack of well organized educational mechanisms for conveying and disseminating contemporary knowledge, aside from its obvious repercussions for the country's competitiveness and national income, also creates problems in the labour market throughout the whole occupational spectrum. In recent years, even graduates of tertiary education, particularly in certain old traditional specialties, are facing problems in being absorbed into the labour market.

At present in the Greek work environment, there is a concentration, at complete variance with demand of working people, in certain fields; at the same time there are shortages in other contemporary sectors. Moreover, qualitative problems have been observed with regard to the education and training provided, along with a failure to link them to production processes and companies.

An intense demand for tertiary education is also constantly observed even in areas linked to economic activities in decline. This demand cannot be satisfied exclusively by the existing State Institutions of Higher Learning, and thousands of Greek students are studying in other countries, taking advantage of the higher educational standards abroad. This results in additional negative forces for the Greek economy.

Specific directions and policies regarding the integration of ICT into the educational system have not yet been developed. There is a need for preparing the students to meet the requirements of the contemporary technological culture.

The new basic skills included in the Lisbon European Council conclusions (paragraph 26) are IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills. All of these are interdisciplinary skills. The Pedagogical Institute in Greece tries to promote the concept of interdisciplinary education in the Greek educational system. However, there is a need for further developing the insights and understanding of students of the role of technology in our contemporary culture. Emphasis must be given to developing interests, technical abilities, creativity, problem-solving abilities, in relation to the technological environment and the world of work.

The application of ICT to real life problems and particularly in relation to concepts of energy, production processes, materials, research, finance, communication, and management, will establish an appropriate educational framework, which can provide incentives for the students. These concepts and practices must be part of the general education in contemporary schools.

Access to ICT for everyone

There is a considerable growth rate in the provision of ICT equipment in Greek schools. Despite this, the majority of students do not have access to ICT equipment in schools and the equipment is not integrated into the educational process of various subjects. E-learning, the use of the Internet, E-mail, utilization of computers in writing assignments, electronic communication with teachers and students in the various parts of the world etc., are far from being part of the everyday practice in Greek schools.

There are no quality assessment procedures in relation to the use of ICT in education. The usual method is the "chalk and talk" method. The children lack perception of the world beyond the school walls. Learning activities are usually confined to homework executed in isolation without peer participation. The children see no relevance of the subject matter to their everyday needs.

According to the Centre of Educational Research (2002): *The introduction of new technologies into the Greek schools is meant to promote ICT as:*

- *an independent subject*
- *a tool of learning for other subjects of the curriculum*
- *a tool in order to support students with learning difficulties.*

All lyceums in Greece (not the students) have an appropriate electronic infrastructure for the administration of the results of the students, for the every day correspondence of the school, and for the central administration of the examinations for access to tertiary education. The questions flow from the Ministry of Education to the schools and the teachers give them to the students to answer.

Only 42% of the schools (not the students) of the first cycle of secondary education schools have access to the Internet and E-mail (1500 schools out of 3700), and only 15% of primary education schools.

ICT as an independent subject is offered in the first cycle of secondary education schools, the lyceums and vocational schools.

According to educational research (International Technology Education Association, 2000), general education programmes in the future will:

- move in the direction of applying technology to solve the major problems facing humankind
- study technology from an international base
- include new areas of content
- group traditional areas into broader areas of study
- become more interdisciplinary and systems oriented
- place emphasis on technical knowledge, research, data retrieval, design, and technological change
- give more attention to effective domain and value systems.

ICT requires a kind of teaching which will combine the democratic elements of society, established pedagogical principles for teaching, opportunities for pupils to express, discover and assess their individual talents and interests in a concrete way, technical aspects without any specific orientation or discrimination, and the performance of a certain amount of technical work.

Increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies

There is not a systematic process to increase the interest of the students to scientific and technical studies from an early age. In contrast, the emphasis of the educational system is on theoretical concepts and classics and the teachers of the relevant subjects compose the major percentage of the teaching population. Emphasis is rarely given to research in relation to technical and scientific subjects while most of the teachers are not familiar with the research process.

Technology is a means of culture in the sense that it is a means of situating one-self in relation to the modern world, in the technical and human aspects that characterize our civilization. It enables the students

to develop an understanding of the relationships between the many fields in the curriculum and reflects the interrelated knowledge of science, mathematics, language, and laboratory work in a way that becomes meaningful to the learner.

The technical object, more than the scientific object, can play the part of a mediator between nature and man, because while the scientific object reveals itself as analytical, abstract, even creating a sense of unreality, the technical object is seen to be synthetical, concrete and in direct relationship to nature. It organizes different sciences and gives it a kind of deep unity. It brings together intentions and laws. However, "learning by doing" occupies far too small a place within Greek schools.

Making the best use of the resources

There is a relatively low level of investment in the development of human resources and the provision of quality education and training. There are no quality assurance systems for education and training nor are there public-private partnership training schemes. The involvement of European programmes contributes to some extent to an exchange of experiences and good practice.

The development and cultivation of individuals for effective functioning in the complex contemporary society must be the first priority of the educational system. This means developing:

- self-understanding on the part of each student
- skills in the areas of social interaction, leadership, and group dynamics
- skills in the areas of learning to learn, problem-solving, inquiring, creating, communicating, and the effective utilization of informational resources
- an understanding of the contributions of technology to the growth and development of civilization
- an understanding of the growth, function, and the significance of labour in contemporary society.

These are some of the necessary objectives for human development according to the needs of contemporary society, which must be integrated into the Greek system.

Teaching methodologies and the activities in which the students are involved are elements of particular importance for human development. The contemporary teacher must be a designer of learning experiences promoting the purposeful involvement of the students in the educational experience. The students must be able to utilize the available resources, to identify sources of information, to apply reasoning and to arrive at conclusions based on information gathered. However, these practices,

basic for contemporary society and educational development, are not the usual practice in the Greek educational system.

Open learning environment

There is an effort at the preliminary stage to develop a framework for lifelong learning by providing information, advice and guidance, on the full range of learning opportunities available. However, adults cannot effectively participate and combine their participation in learning with other responsibilities and activities. Hence, lifelong learning does not respond to the challenges of the knowledge based society, and does not promote flexible learning paths for all. In addition, there are no networks of education and training institutions at various levels in the context of lifelong learning. The funding mechanisms and incentives for adults are very limited and so the percentage of the population between 25 and 64 participating in education and training is low (structural indicator). Continuing education is an objective that could make a particularly important contribution to a rational distribution and redistribution of human resources in Greece at all levels. But the general public has not become conscious of this potential nor have the suitable mechanisms been created. In addition, continuing education, where and when available, is not organized in a systematic manner and the programmes rarely satisfy particular predetermined needs. No specifications are provided with regard to instructors and programmes and there is no system for certifying the qualifications acquired.

Making learning more attractive

Young people try to remain in education after the end of compulsory education since there is a strong tradition in Greek society of university studies. There are not sufficient incentives for adults to participate in learning in later life. There are no methods of validating non-formal learning.

There is no systematic process fostering a culture of learning for all and raising the awareness of potential learners of the social and economic benefits of learning. Distance learning is very limited.

Moreover, there is no real awareness of the need and importance of education as a means for economic modernization and development of the labour market. Economic policy and educational policy are practiced independently and educational programmes do not serve pre-planned economic objectives.

Learning in Greece has been dominated by "diplomas" and the professional rights obtained on behalf of these diplomas, independent of

the real qualifications they represent. They are far from being able to meet present day needs such as prevention of unemployment, reintegration in the place of work, professional advancement, re-specialization etc.

The majority of graduates and the better educated in general, turn towards the so-called "broad public sector", because of its better working conditions and job stability; however, their potential is not suitably exploited in this area. Moreover, in government jobs the pay is very low, as is productivity and incentives, while the organizational and operational framework is out of date.

There is a pressing need for the enactment of a general coordinating framework regarding education in a way that will link it to more general economic objectives. In addition, there is a need for application of contemporary learning processes emphasizing learning for development of human resources.

Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion

Greece has a long tradition in relation to democratic values and democratic participation. All students have equal opportunities in education and training. However, there are not sufficient programmes supporting the less privileged or those currently ill served by the system in motivating them to participate in learning.

According to the Centre of Educational Research (The Greek Educational System, 2002): the public educational expenses are 3.5% of the Gross National Income which is relatively low compared to the other countries of the European Union and of the OECD. An interesting point is that private expenses for primary and secondary education are higher (1.4%), compared to the same countries. This does not contribute to social cohesion.

Parents are involved in creating associations to support various school activities, but they are not involved in school governance.

Strengthening the links with working life, research, and society

There are no links and partnerships of schools with various types of education and training institutions, firms and research facilities, for their mutual benefit. There is no learning at the work place. The participation of local representatives in school life as well as the collaboration of schools with local organizations is very limited. Teachers do not participate in training organized and carried out in cooperation with business.

Like the telegraph and the telephone before it, the Internet has totally changed the traditional operation of society. The Internet has changed the way in which every company carries out its business. The web has already changed the way in which we expect to carry out our personal business, from managing our bank accounts to applying for a car loan. The school must appropriately respond to this new reality and the development of relationships with the world of work is absolutely necessary.

Around the world a debate is raging over the subject of human cloning. At the core of this controversial issue are questions of ethical, religious, societal, scientific, and medical concerns. This issue, and many others, demands that a technologically literate society is developed, enabling well-informed decisions to be made within the controversial realm of bio-technologies dealing with human genetics.

Emphasis must be placed on students developing the ability not only to understand how particular technologies are developed and used, but also to develop the ability to evaluate a technology's effect on other technologies, on the environment, and on society itself.

Research in general and on all these crucial matters is very limited.

Developing the spirit of enterprise

Last year a special programme for the promotion of the spirit of enterprise was launched. From the 8th grade onwards students create companies, study their operation, construct models of the companies, perform roles in a way parallel to the real life. However, there is not a systematic method for the promotion and acquisition of skills needed to set up and run a business, or to be self-employed in the various sectors of the knowledge based economy. There are no education and training institutions providing counselling and guidance for setting up business, neither is there a qualitative assessment process for young graduates starting enterprises according to the needs of the economic sector.

Thanks to the Internet, students can now set up an online model shop for educational purposes just as easily as the huge corporations. They can get instant and free access to company reports, government briefings, export documents, travel information, management theories and just about every type of business advice. An appropriate re-organization of the educational system is necessary to take advantage of these developments. The new definitions of general literacy calls for educational vehicles that integrate the "what", "how" and "why" types of thinking. The learning environment is different in many ways. Participants expect learning experiences to be fun. The multicultural educational environment is not

stable and the learning process is not linear. There is need for a wide variety of experiences.

Improving foreign language learning

Foreign language learning is mainly a matter of private investment for both parents and students. Recently, the introduction of English, French or German courses was initiated in Greek schools. But these courses are not sufficient for the students to obtain a working knowledge of the language studied.

Because of the small population of the country, foreign language learning is a subject of particular importance to the Greek student in order to have access to the explosion of information available in other languages, and to various types of informational resources. Learning foreign languages is a must for future citizens, in order to follow European developments and to increase their employability within the framework of the contemporary economy.

Increasing mobility and exchange

The involvement of various European programmes has increased the mobility of individuals and education and training organizations, including those serving the less privileged public and has reduced obstacles to mobility. There is not a procedure for validation and recognition of competencies acquired during mobility. The application of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in vocational training is very limited.

Mobility is a key factor in the development of a scale economy in Europe in order to face international competition. Awareness raising, promotion of changes in behaviour and involvement of students, citizens, educational institutions, companies, are the key words in the development of mobility.

The concept of mobility and the relationship with the efficiency of the European economy is not integrated into the Greek educational system. Most of the students are not familiar with mobility or its relationships to the economy.

Strengthening European cooperation

Further measures must be taken for the effective and timely recognition of the processes of further study, training and employment of students and graduates moving to Greece. This is necessary for the promotion of transparency of information in education and training opportunities in view of the creation of an open European area of education.

In Greece there is a centre body (DIKATSA), which has the authority for the recognition of diplomas of graduates from foreign universities, as equivalents to the Greek universities diplomas. All university graduates in Europe must apply to "DIKATSA" for recognition of their diplomas. The process involves bureaucratic difficulties, it is time consuming and is not compatible with "the open European area for education", or with the facilitation of the mobility of human resources with high qualifications in particular. If Europe is really an open educational environment then the diplomas of recognized universities at European level must be automatically accepted within the European Union as a whole.

Conclusions

The Greek educational system needs a lot of improvement in order to adapt to the requirements of the learning economy. A number of people in the field of education are of the opinion that the practical character, which is a basic feature of the European educational policies and the correlation of the educational system with the world of work, is going to destroy the humanitarian character of the general education schools, while making them look like vocational schools.

Some others indicate the need for the general educational schools to provide the students with a general overview of the technological world, an understanding of the technological civilization, and the desirable directions for development in relation to personal and social life, within the context of the contemporary world. This second group supports the view that general education schools should offer opportunities for contact with real life and work conditions, team work, practical application of theoretical knowledge, career orientation, creativity and initiative, conscious discovering of the real interests and talents. The acceleration of technological innovation and the resulting changes in society have contributed to major social, economic, and psychological problems. Individuals with the capability to anticipate change and to evaluate alternatives will be less in conflict with such changes as they occur.

All the educators seem to agree that there is a need for appropriate laboratories and facilities as well as appropriate teaching personnel. These requirements are difficult to meet.

Seminars must be organized to enlighten teachers, parents and public about the new conditions. Information regarding the educational

activities in other countries relevant to the adaptation of the educational system to the requirements of the learning economy must be made available. In general ideas relating to skill development, self exploration and intellectual growth rate higher in Greek society than ideas relating to technology and information technology, their contribution to the many stages of man's development and the interpretation of their changing nature.

A lot of educators are concerned with maintaining an appropriate balance with theoretical concepts so that the practical elements will not have the form of mechanistic exercises, and that inferences, generalizations, and associations will be drawn on the part of the students. Affiliation with the academics will lead to an easier acceptance of new elements. Traditional values are still valuable and the new elements must help in the development of the people according to the contemporary needs and for them to be able to function in contemporary society. Practical applications will be based on knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking, permitting transfer to other situations.

A crucial point in the Greek educational system seems to be that the new educational elements for the adaptation to the new world conditions should not disturb existing courses in the curriculum in order to eliminate conflicts or resistance on the part of the teachers. This looks unrealistic if changes have to be made. However, an appropriate strategy must be applied in order change to be introduced.

The European benchmarks and objectives can provide a guiding framework, which has the potentiality to contribute to the efforts for updating the Greek educational system. It can help as a framework of agreement towards which all the different educational forces must work. This approach will also contribute to the development of a European identity.
Research and studies should be connected in order to determine the activities in which the students will be involved within general education for each developmental level, in order to develop the necessary skills for the learning economy. These studies will further elaborate the new role of the teacher and of the teacher's training institutions, the necessary form of laboratories and facilities, the appropriate evaluation procedures, the optimum use and collaboration of the resources of the community, and an information system providing a continuous base to the public as well as to the educational staff, about the new education environment.

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Europe and the Netherlands: challenges and constraints of mutual education policy

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Introduction

In the introductory pages of this CIDREE yearbook the Flemish director-general of secondary education Hostens gives us an illuminative analysis of what he calls "the game of educational policymaking in Europe". During the last decennium there has been a development of a soft approach to a more common educational policy, with greater respect for the identities and policies of the member states of the European Union. With instruments such as the Open Method of Coordination, peer consultancy, indicators and benchmarking, the prudent but ongoing process of adjustment is facilitated and guided. The final outcome is focused on the pursuit to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world.

Dutch society is a purebred European community in miniature. Originally the development of the nation took place in the 16th and 17th century, in a melting pot of cultural diversity. Since that time the Netherlands has been a free haven for artists, scientists and others, persecuted because of their opinions in their country of origin.

Besides that the Netherlands are and have always been a trading nation, focussed on the world outside their own borders. This characterizes two features of Dutch mentality: a desire for freedom and tolerance, and an open mind to the world beyond[1]. An example of the latter is the Dutch willingness to speak and understand, within certain limits, several foreign languages. The Netherlands is the largest of the smaller EU member states, politically and geographically bounded by the three largest ones: Germany, England

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[1] Ernest Zahn, originally a Tsjech scientist, and between 1963 -1981 professor of economic sociology in Amsterdam, emphasises the open, easy and tolerant attitude of the Dutch. In his view the Dutch are practical, business oriented and they have the moral willingness to take care of the world around them. Because of that attitude the Dutch - not necessarily the politicians - are indispensable in Zahn's eyes, for the development of a common Europe. See: Zahn, E. (1984) *Das unbekannte Holland*. Berlin: Siedler.

and France. If the Dutch want to maintain pace with these others, then there is only one prescription: that of ensuring that the quality of our input of expertise into the educational sector can literally be understood. (It is a well-known fact that English as a world language is spoken by 47% of the EU citizens, German by 32% and French 27%. In contrast, Dutch is spoken by only 7% of EU citizens).

Education should prepare young people for a useful and social function in their future life situations. They will live in a world with fading borders and this certainly applies to Europe. Over the last few years a substantial impetus has been given to the internationalisation of Dutch education by cross border cooperation with neighbouring countries and by the possibilities offered by major community programmes, such as the Socrates and Leonardo projects. In addition, or even better, in relationship with this cooperation, there is a national innovation policy, aimed at structural inclusion of cross curricular themes, such as the European and international dimension, in the regular school curriculum and in teacher training programmes.

So, Europe is on the agenda of Dutch education policy, but how open will Europe be to the features of Dutch education? Will Europe offer wider perspectives for further development, or will it be in the final analysis a straightjacket?

In this essay we look at the interpretation of quality development and quality assurance in Dutch education from the perspective of the features that characterize Dutch mentality (sensitivity to freedom, tolerance and respect for the identity and traditions of others). In doing so, we keep in mind the growing tendency towards more autonomy and ownership at the school level, and the consequences of this decentralisation process for a common European education policy. We especially look at the role and position of the curriculum and curriculum development within the processes of change. We elaborate one of the many change processes occurring in Dutch education today. In this case we look closely at the effects of a five-year innovation in upper secondary education.

The system

The Netherlands have, like other European nations, a sophisticated system of education that starts with a continuous period of eight years of primary education. Since 1985 the separated system of nursery education and primary has been integrated into a new system of primary education. Formal compulsory education starts at the age of five, and there has been a debate to bring this age down to four, since almost all children attend primary school as from this age. Dutch primary education is obligatory

for all children. All children, including those with behavioural or learning problems, are accepted at regular primary schools. For children with highly specific needs, such as those with serious mental or physical handicaps, there are separate, special schools. Before primary education different types of day-care and pre-schooling are available, most of which operate on a private base.

After primary school, most pupils go on to pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo), to general secondary education (havo), or pre-university education (vwo). These three types of education start with a period of common basic education. Pre-vocational secondary education was introduced in 1999. It takes four years and is mainly intended to be a preparation for upper secondary vocational education. General secondary education takes five years and is mainly meant to be a preparation for higher professional education. Pre-university education takes six years and is a preparation for university. All levels have four subject combinations (profiles). Besides that there is a segment of the pupil population that lacks the ability to obtain a qualification. There is a special form of employment-oriented training for them. Compulsory education lasts until the end of the school year in which students reach the age of sixteen.

Freedom as a feature

The Dutch educational system provides wide ranging freedoms for schools. Citizens have the freedom and right to set up schools based on their religious conviction, social principles, or their educational or pedagogical views and preferences. As a result there is a wide range of schools in the Netherlands from which parents can make a choice for their children. When the foundation requirements have been met - an important criterion being the minimum number of children attending the school - schools are entitled to equal funding by the government.
In comparison with many other countries, schools in the Netherlands have a wide range of freedom concerning educational content and the pedagogic and didactic approach. Schools have room for their own educational concept, they have their own educational policy, they choose their own teaching resources, and they distribute the school hours as they see fit.
The government's limit to interfere with the content of education through central regulations has its origins in article 23 of the Constitution. In this article the freedom of education is guaranteed. Although this article was introduced in 1917, the Dutch people are still very much attached to this

freedom with respect to founding schools and support organisations. However, the Netherlands are not the only nation with a sophisticated respect for freedom in education. Together with Belgium, Austria, Denmark, England and Wales and New Zealand, the Dutch belong to a group of countries that allows above average freedom at the meso-level (De Groof & Glenn, 2002).

Curricular aims and content

In light of the freedom of education, it is hardly surprising that the central regulations regarding curricular content are modest. The Primary Education Act for instance, regulates only a few guidelines for content and the organisation of education. Subjects and areas of attention mentioned include arithmetic, language, history and geography, art education and sensory and physical development. However, what should be taught in those subjects or areas of attention is not indicated in this Act. Neither is there legislation with respect to the time to be devoted to each of the subjects.

Much is left to the school itself and to writers and publishers of textbooks and other educational resources. The freedom with respect to the content has been curtailed since 1993, when core objectives were introduced. Core objectives describe the outline of what each school must offer its pupils. In 1998 the core objectives were revised. At this very moment the third generation of core objectives is under construction for primary education and for basic education. There is a trend to formulate the objectives even more globally than in previous years. The objectives can be considered as an articulation of the intentions of society regarding the nature and content of the school, rather than as a detailed programme of study. There is also a tendency to formulate the core objectives under wider headings. In the current format of description the subject structure has disappeared and is restructured in a model of learning areas.

In secondary education there are timetables and regulations with respect to examinations. Freedom is much more limited than in primary education. However, for the whole system it is true that what has been formally laid down by law - and often in minute detail -, concerns the conditions under which education takes place and the issues concerning funding.

Trend towards more autonomy

In the last decennia a lot of changes have occurred in Dutch society especially in the field of education. The way in which the government wants to take responsibility moves towards the direction of a shared responsibility with owners of different levels in the education field. There is a concrete movement, also internationally recognizable, towards more autonomy at the school level[2] and the growing influence of market orientation. Originally this autonomy was focused at or limited to the level of the organisation of the school.

In the policy field there is some discord about the curricular consequences with respect to the growing tendency of autonomy. On the one hand there is a tendency towards a firmer grip on the curricular content. There are pleas for the development of output standards, more accountability and the carrying out of the principles of the so-called effective school. The tendency to a more severe regulation of the content of education certainly finds its roots in the wish to compare the quality of education with other western oriented nations and the efforts to develop a common education policy in Europe. A more or less common policy needs criteria and benchmarking for purposes of comparison and ranking.

On the other hand there is a growing feeling in the post-modern society of the 21st century that complex issues such as education are not to be couched in the seeming security of rational, logical and centrally mastered and comparative systems.

The concept of schooling is changing. The Dutch Social Cultural Planning Office (CPB) (Bronneman-Helmers & Taes, 1999) has observed that schools are under severe pressure. This is a finding of their research of the tasks of schools in a changing society. Traditional allocation of tasks between schools, families, authorities and agencies outside the school is no longer obvious. Education becomes more and more a plaything for society.

There is a growing need for more responsibility and trust in the reliability of the teacher. The need for more autonomy at the school level however has also to do with a shift in thinking regarding learning and teaching and alters our focus from the central level to the meso level and even more to the responsibility of the micro level where education really takes place.

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[2] see: the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Archive www.inca.org.uk

Ways of quality assurance

Especially within a context that tends towards more autonomy and diversity there is a need for transparency and accountability. The basic reason is to convince yourself (as a nation, as a responsible minister of education, as a school, as a teacher, as a parent) that you are doing the right things for the generation of youngsters for whom you are responsible, or to put forward your evidence as to why you should change your efforts into another direction.

Just like other countries, the Netherlands has a sophisticated system of quality assurance, survey and control. We are not striving for a complete overview of all the measurements here, but the following examples give an idea of the range of activities at different levels of concern.

Periodical review

At the request of the Ministry of Education, the National Institute for Educational Assessment (Cito-group) carries out a periodical survey of quality in primary education and has done for over ten years now. The survey concerns domains of learning in primary school and takes place in grade eight (which is the last year of primary school). The aim is to describe the final level reached by a majority of pupils in certain areas of learning. Besides that there is survey half way through primary school, dealing with Dutch language and arithmetic. It is relevant to mention that the survey extends over areas, which are not regularly within the domain of such research, including English, music, physical education, traffic education and specific domains such as the writing skills of pupils. The surveys give a detailed answer to questions concerning the results of the educational efforts. There is a relation with the demands of the core objectives. The results of the surveys are distributed to several institutions in the educational field, and to the national and regional institutes in the support structure, the inspectorate, educational publishers and advisory committees. The survey is a kind of trend study to chart what pupils are learning and what possible changes are necessary in the future with regard to developments in society and science.

International surveys

The Dutch are also participating in international surveys such as TIMSS[3] and PIRLS. Sometimes it is pleasant to notice that one's country is forging ahead in a certain domain. We refer to the results of the recent PIRLS-study[4]. PIRLS is the so-called Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. The Netherlands appeared to be second best in the ranking.

Visitation

Like in other countries, control at school level is carried out by visitation. The inspectorate is the relevant actor in this respect. Recognizing that the national authorities withdraw from precise regulation of the national curriculum as far as it concerns the content of education, the role of the inspectorate becomes more like a guardian angel with regard to the quality involved. At the moment the inspectors make use of the instrument of regular school supervision (in Dutch: RST). It means that it is the inspectorate's aim to visit the primary school each year. If the inspector's visit gives cause the inspectorate may decide to have an Integral School Supervision (in Dutch: IST). This means a more in-depth review of the school than is possible under RST. Under integral school supervision the inspectorate thoroughly examines the entire primary school by means of an extensive checklist. This checklist includes aspects at both school and classroom level.

The inspectorate has, as has been said, a responsibility to individual schools and each year it describes the state of Dutch education in an annual report. Recently they published the report about the state of education in 2002 (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2003). The general conclusion of the report is that the state of education is rather good, but that there is growing concern about the lack of teachers. They also conclude that the level of ambition as described in the treaty of Lisbon as being a nation with high standard knowledge development, does not meet the contemporary situation.

At the moment there is also a debate about the limits of inspectoral responsibility. In some cases the interference of the inspectorate is seen as a too emphatic concern in the field of pedagogical and didactical

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[3] The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, formerly known as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study).
[4] PIRLS 2001 is the first in a planned 5-year cycle of international trend studies in reading literacy.

issues. The debate is still going on in the Netherlands, but it is certainly an international debate as well (Standaert, 2001).

Monitoring systems

At school level there are other quality measures as well. The government asks schools to meticulously monitor the pupils' development in case their development stagnates so that the problem can be identified in time. It will be obvious that schools should try to solve these problems themselves. Schools are expected to use a system that enables them to monitor the development of their pupils. Most schools with a pupil monitoring system use the one developed by Cito-group, the National Institute for Educational Assessment. Whatever system they use, each school is obliged to monitor the pupils' progress systematically. This has proved to be very conducive to the quality of education.

Analysis of textbooks

Just like everywhere else in the world, teachers in primary education use educational materials (learning materials for children; manuals for teachers, etc). Occasionally teachers produce their own materials, but in most cases they use materials developed by specialist educational publishers. Unlike many other countries, there is no prescribed curriculum for primary education in the Netherlands. Neither is there an authority or agency that prescribes what educational materials schools should use. Schools decide on these matters themselves.

However, in order to get some grip on the quality of educational materials, the government has decided to adopt guidelines for educational materials formulated by the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO). Materials brought onto the market by educational publishers are assessed on a number of criteria, such as:

- do they meet the requirements of the legal core objectives?
- what is their didactic quality?
- do they take the differences between children sufficiently into account?
- do they sufficiently reflect the spirit of the Dutch multicultural society, and is the equality of the sexes (girls/boys) represented to a sufficient degree?
- are they user-friendly? Do they offer value for money?

In a number of guides (for arithmetic/mathematics, language education, environmental studies, etc.) we find descriptions of the outcomes of the analysis of educational materials related to these aspects. It will be

obvious that such a guide is primarily meant for developers of educational materials, but schools, too, may benefit from them, e.g. by choosing from materials that meet the requirements they (the schools) find important.

School plan and school guide

In order to encourage schools to improve their quality in a planned and structured way, the government has set up basic regulations and developed instruments by means of which this can be achieved without endangering the schools' freedom to organise the educational process according to their own preferences. As of January 1999, each school for primary and secondary education must have a school plan, a school guide and rules for lodging complaints. In these documents the school gives an outline of what it promises to do.

Once every four years, each school must make its own school plan. This plan is a document in which the school's policy with respect to the quality of education is described. It deals with education policy, staff policy and internal quality control and it is meant to stimulate an integrated policy with respect to quality and forms the basis for discussing that policy within the school. The school plan is also a document in which the school gives an account of its policy in relation to the inspectorate.

In the educational section of the school plan the school can describe which textbooks are used and the reason why, as well as the way in which the school caters for children with specific educational needs. With respect to staff policy the school plan may address such issues as in-service training, counselling and division of tasks and the activities of the staff.

It also deals with collecting data about the quality of education, such as mapping out the learning outcomes or by asking parents' and pupils' opinions about the strengths and weaknesses in education. It is obvious that the school will also indicate what measures are taken to improve the quality.

The school plan is written for the inspectorate, the body that will eventually assess the quality of education in a school. Its real function is to serve as an internal account for the school itself, which is open for discussion within the school.

A school guide, on the other hand, is a document for the outside world. It provides information about the school to parents and other interested parties. In the school guide, the school shows its aims and principles and

the way they are to be achieved. In the school guide the school also describes how it intends to work out its own distinct profile.

Procedure for complaints

Not everything runs smoothly at school. Normally, attempts are made to solve problems and differences of opinion between teachers and parents, between teachers or between teachers and the head through personal discussion. If that is not possible, each school is required to have a procedure through which someone can lodge a complaint. Parents can also lodge complaints through the inspectorate. Certain regulations have been created for this situation.

Examinations

In secondary education there are school examinations and central examinations. Very often the final judgment is based on the results of a combination of school examinations during the year and a culminating final examination, marked by a diploma.

Quality: an ambiguous concept

In spite of the range of quality instruments sketched out above there is no guarantee that by using them you will get the results you aimed at. That applies to national efforts for accountability and transparency, and also to European or broader efforts. Are for instance, the rankings of schools in Dutch newspapers real reflections of quality, or are some schools better in the communication process with the inspectorate than others? Are the fifteen quality indicators of lifelong learning (European Commission, 2002) really objective keystones, or are they an expression of vague western oriented views on the way specific groups in society like to look at the world, "Weltanschauung" as the German word expresses it so adequately?

Recently the Dutch Education Council (Onderwijsraad, 2003) published its advice to the minister of education regarding the consequences of the mutual European quality approach for Dutch education policy. The Council states that the key objectives of the European ministers deliver useful data for comparisons and that they challenge the Netherlands to achieve its aims in a more coherent fashion. Based on their vision of quality the Council concludes that the Netherlands are still far from their stated ambition.

There are many answers related to the question of good education. In our opinion it is a very powerful development that the questions raised are seriously deliberated by the heads of state and the ministers of education, but this does not mean that the answers can be found unilaterally in the elaborations of more or less coincidental committees organised around those indicators. An ongoing debate about the quality and the direction of the development of education in member states of the European Union is profitable, but the proceeds can be easily abrogated by a too-narrow approach. Besides that, quality is a very subjective concept, value-loaded and often approached from different angles.

A real shift or a small change of direction?

If we subscribe the central aim of the contemporarily European education policy, expressed by the heads of states and their ministers, that Europe intends 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, then we should thoroughly reconsider our thinking on education, the structures we are using and our traditional opinions about quality. Most of the school systems in Europe have their roots in the 18th and early 19th centuries and they are based on a Cartesian view of the sources and structures of knowledge and on the legacy of the positivists. The challenge every country faces now is how to become a learning society and to ensure that its citizens are equipped with what they really need in this complex society of the demanding 21st century.

An important challenge for education policy in this era is how to deal with important changes in opinions about how learning and teaching should take place. You may say that we are at this very moment on the threshold of what is called the "old" and the "new" ways of learning, that is the change from a routinely, behaviouristic based model of learning into a more personally oriented way of constructing knowledge. You can also characterise this shift with the change in concepts from instructivism to constructivism[5]. In this emergent alteration there is a need for another design of the learning environment and a different role for the teacher. The competency of teachers appears unrelated to their control of subject knowledge and the ways to transfer this, but more to the ways they motivate, challenge development and stimulate individual pupils. Transfer of a standardised and codified set of knowledge and skills is less

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[5] See in this respect the first CIDREE-yearbook "Turning the perspective", especially the contribution of Lodewijks (2001) about learning and teaching.

important than provoking questions, challenging imagination and stimulating active learning skills

Teachers are also supposed to be responsible for school development, for reflecting on their own actions, and for having an awareness of the place of the school within the community. As such the changing face of pedagogic, didactics and professionalism automatically conflicts with a strict centralized direction. The implications for education policy are not yet fundamentally clear and crystallized in the Dutch context of education. In fact we see at this moment old instrumentation and new insights struggling to work together, but also a movement to adapt old instruments and develop new instruments for the emergent needs of the new school situation.

An example of change

In the Netherlands we see in the perspective of quality improvement tentative attempts in a new direction. Tentative, because innovations are going slowly and take time, nevertheless we can see them in all layers of the Dutch school system. When we look somewhat closer at one layer, in this case *upper secondary education*, we notice an ongoing tendency to a rather different approach of learning and teaching. At the beginning of the nineties the Dutch government and the world of education were convinced that education should be adapted to the current demands, conceptually as well as regarding didactic structure. For years, complaints had been heard about the poor transition from pre-university education to universities, caused by the lack of study skills, language skills and general knowledge.

These convictions and findings have resulted in a new curriculum for the second stage of pre-university education comprising a broader offering, requiring application of new technology, more independent work and responsibility on the part of the student. The investment required by students was illustrated for the first time when the 40-hour study load was established.

All in all this places higher demands on the students. Right from the start intensification was one of the characteristics of the renewal of pre-university education. This was broadly supported in 1994, when 89% of the teachers considered the intensification of pre-university education justified.

Initially the presumption was that fewer students would be able to meet the demands of the second stage of pre-university education. In a later phase the intensification of the programme was placed in a different

light: broadening (more subjects) with a view to general knowledge, categorization into subject combinations (profiles) and emphasizing active learning methods. However, these requirements had to be achieved by a student population of a size comparable to that which qualified for the old style examination system. The requirements were heightened by broadening the programme, the use of more active and independent learning and because of the heavier study load. At the same time different measures were taken to increase flexibility.

The question is whether these measures do not interfere with the original intentions that played an important role in setting up the "second stage reform". Therefore in the ongoing discussion on the revamping of pre-university education and the transition to university education the current objective will have to be discussed as a crucial policy question in the process of change.

Key changes

Four key changes can be derived from the main characteristics of educational reform:
- more than was previously the case education is now aimed at acquiring skills
- the students will have a more active role in the learning process. The role of the teacher will consequently change to one of supervisor
- the student can process the subject matter at his/her own level and at his/her own speed
- the subject matter is presented in a way that clearly shows the relationships within and between subjects, and is presented as a method of coherent learning.

A major innovation process

Secondary education is in the process of implementing a major educational innovation. In 1999 all schools providing pre-university education introduced sets of subject combinations and the "studiehuis" construction, which requires students to acquire skills and knowledge in a much more independent capacity. Four subject combinations are linked to higher education disciplines.

The four fixed subject combinations, from which students select one, are:
- science and technology
- science and health
- economics and society
- culture and society.

Each combination of subjects consists of:

- a common core of subjects, which is the same for all students
- a specialised compulsory component which is different for each subject combination
- an optional component.

Skills directed learning: a new balance

Knowledge and understanding remain important, but in addition, more attention has to be paid to acquiring skills such as technical, general, social and study skills. What they comprise is described in the new educational objectives. Cross-curricular skills have also been defined. They include gathering, selecting and processing information; reaching one's own standpoint based on arguments; making a work plan; cooperating within a project; orientation on one's own interests and possibilities for the future.

Supervised learning

The student will have more opportunities to master skills if he/she is given a more active role in the process. Therefore the emphasis will shift from classroom instruction to more independent work by the student. The student is stimulated to take as much responsibility as possible and keep track of his/her study progress. In doing so, the student will learn to be aware of his/her own learning process and to adjust where and when necessary. The teacher acts as a supervisor, checking on the student, pointing out progress and deficiencies and helping out if necessary. This approach requires new teaching methods, such as activating teaching methods and giving assignments that are not only to be carried out within, but also outside the school. What kind of assignments are applicable here and which requirements do they have to meet?

Differentiated learning

It is the right of every individual to reach full personal development. Education cannot ignore the differences between individuals. Everybody has strong and weak qualities. One person may be creative, another analytical. One person may perform best individually, another performs better in a group situation. We have to take these differences into account and do as much justice to them as possible in order to make learning advantageous to everybody.
Learning styles can be changed!
This is one of the most difficult tasks that education is facing nowadays. How can you learn to see the differences in children? And how can you

deal with these differences in such a way that they are beneficial to both the child and society?

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is an important means for differentiated learning. With ICT tools learning materials can be made flexible enough for students to learn at their own speed and at their own level. All the educational publishers are currently working on ICT materials.

Coherent learning

School management is an important driver of the reform process. However, it is the teacher who holds the key to reform. The changes described cannot be realised with teachers working from the isolated positions of their jobs. To be able to do justice to coherent learning teachers need to operate as a team.

Not only the relationship between students and teachers is changing, but also the relationship between the teaching staff and school management. Together management and teaching staff are reflecting on how the developments will be initiated in the school. Together they make choices and together they propagate a pedagogical-didactical vision and address one another on this. Teaching resources are not the exclusive area of concern of the teachers. The school management will also discuss teaching resources, because they have to fit into the vision that has been jointly established.

The fact that so many conditions need to be met makes it clear that the development from teaching towards learning will be a process that takes many years of work. Schools will have to gain considerably more experience before they will be familiar with a different organisation of the educational learning process, also called the learning organisation.

Achievements

Over the last five years of development in adoption and implementation much has been achieved in education. Teachers look out for different teaching/learning methods that allow more room for *"active and independent learning"*. The Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) developed new examination programmes and examples of activating lessons. These lessons are supplemented with didactical guidelines, which were discussed and endorsed. Schools structured their organisation according to the new requirements and adapted of their buildings. According to the inspectorate the following achievements can already be observed:

- *update of the examination programmes*: the implementation of the second stage of secondary education entailed fundamental thinking

by subject development groups regarding the requirements of preparatory higher education from the perspective of the admission requirements of higher education

- *structuring into subject combinations*: the subject combinations are intended to make a student aware of future possibilities in a timely manner. They should offer a clear perspective on the requirements of follow-up education and should improve preparation thereon

- *didactical variation*: the first publications on independent work and learning gave teachers the incentive to evaluate their traditional didactical working methods and they considered to what extent they could structure their lessons so that students would have to be more active in working independently

- *broadening*: the obligation to have more languages, cultural education, natural science orientation and socio-historical introduction intends to broaden the general knowledge of the students. It is positive that students who advance to higher education have had a broader orientation than is required for their choice of study in higher education

- *problems*: bottlenecks are associated with the implementation process in schools and with issues outside the range of influence of the school. These require a central approach. Examples are: the imbalance between the weight of some examination programmes and the available time allotted for students; the lack of facilities, like insufficient possibilities for organisation and preparation by teachers; the lack of autonomy of schools in the process of change and reform.

What can be the conclusion after five years of educational reform in higher secondary education?

This example of quality improvement in higher secondary education shows us the following achievements:

- the majority of schools appreciate the premise of a more active student as well as the conceptual innovations
- schools themselves now take the initiative to change the teaching/learning process
- schools realise that skills should not be trained at the cost of the necessary knowledge in higher education
- the work pressure on teachers is too high
- schools should have more leeway for the development of policy
- the collaboration between secondary and higher education has been considerably improved

- effective implementation of reforms takes time and determination.

The motor for implementation is always formed by those who will implement the concept. Understandably, real curriculum development requires a whole "*motor gang*".
We have placed our emphasis on this specific example, because we believe that sustainable change in a European perspective needs to be nurtured from the efforts in other member countries. Peer consultation between member states, exchange and consultation, with respect for different conditions and time tables will contribute, in our view, to the ambitious aims of the heads of state.

The delicate role of curriculum development

In the example above we have pointed out the necessity of a certain freedom of action for schools and the relevance of ownership and autonomy at school level. We notice that in the international educational area governments strive to grant more autonomy and responsibility to primary and secondary schools so that these have more flexibility and responsibility. Schools get more opportunity for experiments and innovations by testing them in everyday practice. At the same time they are facing clear demands with respect to quality and efficacy.
Within that process there is an unmistakable role for curriculum development and curricular support, taking into account that it meets the needs of the teaching problems of teachers. A larger policy profile for schools will support the possibilities for development of individual pupils. The necessity of investments in curriculum renewal has been subscribed too by the Commission of the European Communities.

Growing autonomy has many consequences for the curriculum. Depending on the ability of schools they can arrange initiatives for a unique and specific curriculum policy at school level according to their concept of education. The growing autonomy (room) versus the demands and wishes of the central government (account and results) can be characterised as freedom within constraints. Teams in schools are supposed to contribute on the one hand to the achievement of core objectives, attainment targets, the development of competencies, the implementation of independent learning, and on the other hand they are supposed to determine in what manner they would organise education in exciting, challenging, and innovating ways.

Curriculum development can gain more meaning whenever it profiles itself as a continuous base for development at the various levels of education (macro - meso - micro). Besides that, curriculum development should be constantly aware of the practical relevance of its ambitions within each of the levels of operation. The Netherlands has an educational support system with national institutes. For curriculum development and support there is the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO). During its existence its position and tasks have changed. From a more or less central operating institute, SLO now supports school development at the base level.

SLO's work is aimed at contributing to school development in the areas of education contents and learning processes. SLO acts as a mediator between the government, determining the policy, and the schools that have to realise that policy. However, in this role SLO is not an extension of the government. On the contrary, SLO wishes to be a partner for schools in the area of conceptual quality improvement initiated by the government.

In a phase characterised by increasing interest, room for deregulation and an increase in autonomy, it appears that innovation policy is also initiated and valued by the schools themselves.

The mission, aims and strategy of SLO are largely determined by the innovation policy of the government and the policy and requests of the schools themselves. Nevertheless, other clients can also be served as long as the work concentrates on education contents, planning and learning processes.

SLO is aware of its role in the natural tension between the government (as the policy makers) and education, which is confronted with the results and/or demands of that policy. In this respect SLO mediates between two parties, who share the common objective to contribute to the improvement of the quality of education and the learning processes. In the working process SLO's main issue is the involvement of schools in development work.

Collaboration with schools in the process of curriculum development has always been the premise of the project activities taken up by SLO. Now the mission of SLO is changing from exclusively indirect support to direct support. The strategy of working in the environment of the school is now more fundamental than ever and more than ever, the teaching profession is at the heart of public interest in the matter. The teacher is the key person in the education processes and the changes that affect them. Recognition of these changes is the most important condition for continuous quality improvement in education. It is obvious that at this

moment considerable attention is being paid to the persisting problems concerning the management of education by managers and boards. All the same, education should be primarily associated with *the teacher.*

Why intended changes do not always succeed

Despite good intentions and efforts not everything that starts with enthusiasm and motivation will succeed. This goes for knowledge development, as well as for the implementation of ideas, products and services. Different reasons can be given for the failure of the intended changes. It is good to have them in mind, especially from the perspective of the European attempts. For example:

- the intended changes were insufficiently conceptualised and it was not clear who was to benefit
- the change did not fit into the school practice and the ambition level was too high, causing teachers to lose their involvement
- the change did not link up with the current school practice and took place in isolation
- there was no adequate long-term support structure with professional coordination, that clarified the roles and responsibilities of teachers, developers and researchers who are working closely together in the school environment
- no implementation policy was formulated at school level, so that everything revolves around the teacher
- the nature of the concept was insufficiently defined in terms of behaviour; continuous interpretations irritated the process
- there was insufficient interest for the subject by pupils and parents and therefore vital support was absent.

More reasons can be added to which implementation research can make a fundamental contribution. It remains curious however that so little is learned from the disappointments and failures of operations throughout the world. Perhaps it is time to have a thorough analysis of the highs and lows of innovations and to ask ourselves the question how realism and pragmatism can be connected to the necessary inspiration of ideals.

Globalisation or glocalisation

In the future internationalisation or sustainable globalisation will continue to change our economic, cultural, political and educational structures. It is not unthinkable that the states will gradually lose their present functions,

because education systems grow towards one another. Obviously, learning from one another already existed before the acceleration of globalisation. Expertise was concentrated in international organizations, such as UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank and in international expert forums. The idea to develop international standards was strongly advocated by the OECD. European networks of experts for research and development are also open to a development process aiming at common quality indicators for school subjects. Organizations such as the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education (CIDREE) and The Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education (SICI) produce system reviews, comparisons and evaluations, by means of indicators and instruments. They also develop common visions on curriculum aspects, exchange practical examples and participate in collaborative projects. We observe that the ministries of different states increasingly adapt their education policies according to the results of international comparative research (see TIMMS, an international comparative study into learning results in mathematics and the exact sciences).

At the same time, however, regions promote and advance their own cultural identity and they demand political recognition and economic protection. The local prevails over the universal and the parties involved consider the preservation of the own language, morals and habits to be more essential than a common national culture. This will lead to communities within communities, which do not always welcome "strangers".

Of course, there are also teachers who would like their pupils to experience mutual dependency of *"there and here"* and point out the differences and similarities between *"far away and nearby"*. (This is also called the educational principle of globalisation versus glocalisation).

The states will have to anticipate decentralized forces and in the long run they will not be able to put themselves forward as the keepers of a unified culture. The multi-ethnic society, consisting of a large variety of cultural minorities, will develop itself further and further. At the same time political and social groups will try to enforce a new nationalism, at the expense of a just and humane society. It is also a task and responsibility of education to create a pedagogically and ethically responsible climate in the institution of the school. In addition they should offer a physically and mentally safe environment, enabling students to fully develop their talents.

Discussion

European self-awareness and a clear vision on shared ambitions and values in the field of education is an important step towards a common

policy. There are many important issues to discuss and to bring forward. A structured debate is a basic condition for understanding and cooperation. It is encouraging that the heads of state and ministers of education put so much emphasis on educational matters as they do. Willingness to cooperate is a premise for success, but not the only one. The collective ambition should be embedded in or be surrounded by a variety of provisions that guarantee real opportunities to still unexpected solutions.

In our view the contemporarily approach that focuses on the extension of the knowledge economy and a better accessibility to education for larger groups has its benefits, but it is also a focus, with attendant risks, of much narrower views. The chosen triangle approach or interdependent relations between goal setting, the development of a knowledge society and economic growth is basically number and criterion driven and depends on a constant comparison of data originated in different contexts. This can easily lead to a biased result. The view on values or the "Weltanschauung" that speaks from the chosen approach might be more influential on a possible common education strategy. It can be questioned in what way the approach will lead to shallowness instead of a valuable influence by knowing and appreciating the richness of diversity. European member states vary in historical, ethical, psychological, ideological, cultural, economical and social perspective. The development of an education system is closely related to the development of nations and therefore has a specific structure and character. People in the member countries are shaped by their backgrounds, just as they contributed to the specific development or nature of their nation. Diversity is in that respect more an enrichment than a problem. Diversity is the challenge or motivation for discovery, for curiosity. In our opinion one of the corner stones of European education policy should be to cherish such diversity and to make it tangible and understandable. We refer in this respect to Elliot Eisner (1998), from Stanford University, when he talks about the kinds of schools we need. Eisner states that the mission of successful schools is decidedly not to bring everyone to the same place but, rather, to increase the variance in performance among students while escalating the mean for all. The reason is that the cultivation of cognitive diversity is an excellent way of creating a population better able to contribute uniquely to the common weal.

By saying this we do not mean to say that there are no common aspects in the curriculum. The development of education systems and their corresponding curricula in Europe has not been so autonomous that we could not discover common features.

Another cornerstone of the European debate should be an ongoing questioning of the innovative architecture of the education system. In this system expectations and demands of 21st century society should assume priority, instead of the constant repair of an insufficient relict from the past decade. In other words: if Europe really wishes to realise its ambitions, it has to do better than come up with old answers to new questions.

Thus, we should reconsider the traditional ways of year grouping in most of our schools, related to a curriculum that is focused at the non-existing average pupil.

We should also look at meaningful coherence in the curriculum, instead of persisting in the traditional and not very motivating atomic subject structure.

We also assert that the focus of European education policy should not be constantly in the competitive stance of how to score better than your neighbour country in an international survey on a specific area. We prefer to see education policy as a mutual endeavour in the context of a European education area, and not as an arena.

We think that education policy should focus on the challenge of how to improve the motivation of pupils in European schools, for instance by taking them more seriously than we apparently do and by giving them a more explicit role in curriculum decisions. At the core, pupils are responsible for their own development and if we assent to this statement then the pupils' role cannot be neglected.

European education policy that is focused more on equalization instead of dealing with diversity is not a productive paradigm, and is in that sense contradictory to the formulated ambitions of the leaders of state and government.

Besides the formulated ambitions of the European Commission, we should reconsider the conditions of change. Recently we noticed in Europe how difficult and expensive it was to convert to a single monetary unit. That relatively simple aspect of European unification suffered a lot of resistance, cost a tremendous amount of money and required a sophisticated organisation in all countries. And we are only talking about currency! Reshaping an educational system, and that is what we really want, if we take the formulated ambitions seriously, is quite another challenge. In the Netherlands we have experienced how difficult it is to introduce a new learning strategy in upper secondary education, called the "studiehuis" (study house). We strongly believe that the educational ideas and the underlying opinions about how pupils learn

are, in the "studiehuis" concept, valuable. The implementation however has not been a great success so far, which in our view is due to insufficient facilities and underestimation of the complexity of the concept.

When we look at the European strategy aimed at a common education policy - a much wider ambition than the example we gave before - we cannot ignore the fact that the strategy of soft open coordination is a vulnerable instrument. Change should be facilitated with proper budgets related to the breadth of the ambitions and supported by the commitment of the people involved. People however, as we have learned from Fullan, can also be the main obstacles in processes of change.

In our opinion the pursuit for excellent European education should not, or not only, be built on a foundation of undoubtedly well-intentioned indicators and benchmarks, developed and elaborated in settings far away from the place where education takes place, but in the readiness of a fundamental debate about toppling our traditional thinking about education. In the first CIDREE-yearbook (Letschert, 2001) we spoke about "Turning the perspective". This turning process starts with the basic question: What kind of people do we really like to be?, instead of: What economy do we want to create? If we want to persist with indicators, it would be better to find answers to questions such as: How meaningful is education for those for whom we develop it? Does it inspire teachers and pupils? Does it contribute to the competency of pupils to think creatively? And finally: Does it add value to our lives? That last question is in fact, or should be, the driving force in the European education process. An economic perspective is included in the answers, as are the perspectives of ethics, cultural heritage, social cohesion and the meaning of life.

The Lisbon ambition to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world should not be interpreted as a unilateral economically driven aim. We are not really interested in a debate about the aspects of a €uropean curriculum. We rather want to focus on the European dimension in cooperative and meaningful educational development and curriculum exchange. This is an ongoing process that will not stop at some fixed future date. It is a process that follows the development of people, their thinking, the trends in society, the economic perspectives of nations, but most of all the beliefs of people. In this process you need constantly to find new balances in curriculum questions on issues like:

- generic versus context specific knowledge
- breadth versus depth in curricular coverage

- excellence versus equity in outcomes
- basic versus higher order learning outcomes.

The challenge for the member states of the European Union is to be constantly open to new perspectives, to cherish a sincere appreciation of and esteem for the unique aspects of their own communities, and to persist in a readiness for cooperation. Of course, you also need a reliable and qualitative infrastructure to support your ambition. In this light it is at least remarkable, from our Dutch perspective, that representation of the national curriculum institute SLO is not evident in any of the European committees.

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The implementation strategy of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Helmut Bachmann

A short retrospective glance

In Austria, the national work on implementing EU-objectives, started immediately when the decision to do so was formulated at the European level. For the Austrian authorities the key objective was to establish some coherence between the Detailed Work Programme on the one hand and national discussions as well as political reforms on the other.

In Austria the Detailed Work Programme is considered as a flexible tool that provides enough space to set national priorities. However, in using indicators and benchmarks, in the implementation of steering and control in the field of education and training, we are treading on relatively new ground.

Some of the objective indicators have already been defined, but most of them still lack a reliable set of measuring tools. Despite the fact that not all the indicators have been defined yet, the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SIGB), set up by the Commission and assisted by the eight expert working groups (plus one additional group for languages) has already started. Especially for soft skills in themes like civic education there is a lack of suitable indicators.

In January 2003 the Commission produced a Communication on Benchmarking that indicates the progress that is to be made in a number of fields. Because of the prior relevance in our national debate benchmark-policy is briefly reflected here.

The Commission invited the Council and all member states to adopt the European benchmarks by 2010. Based on this a controversial debate took place which led to a modification of the benchmarks.

The Council's Conclusions on Reference Levels of European Average Performance in Education and Training (Benchmarks) summarizes these modifications:

- by 2010, an EU average rate of no more than 10% of early school leavers[1] should be achieved
- the total number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology[2] in the European Union should increase by at least 15% by 2010 while at the same time the level of gender imbalance should decrease
- by 2010, at least 85% of 22 year-olds in the European Union should have completed upper secondary education[3]
- by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15 year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000[4]
- by 2010, the European Union average level of participation in Lifelong Learning should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population (25-64 age group)[5].

In Austria, we consider the Detailed Work Programme to be an important step forward in the quality of cooperation at the European level without infringing the principle of subsidiary embedded in the Articles 149 and 150 of the EU Maastricht Treaty.

The international context

A considerable part of the efforts to meet the challenges of the policy of objectives in Austria has been placed in an international context. For a better understanding of that context some information on the experts work at European level is given here[6]. The content of the

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[1] Share of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and not in education or training (structural indicator) – Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey.

[2] Total number of tertiary (ISCED levels 5&6) graduates from the Mathematics, Science and Technology fields – source joint UNESCO/OECD/Eurostat questionnaire.

[3] Percentage of those aged 22 who have successfully completed at least upper secondary education (ISCED 3) –Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey.

[4] Reading literacy proficiency "level 1" and lower - Source PISA (OECD 2000).

[5] Percentage of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training in four weeks prior to the survey –Source Eurostat; Labour Force Survey. A Eurostat taskforce is currently undertaking work on a new Adult Education Survey that would yield a better measure of participation.

[6] The author of this contribution is member of the working group "G"; therefore the working process of that group is taken as an example.

following chapter is based on the draft of the interim report of working group "G".

Working group G met for the first time in January 2003. The next three meetings took place in Brussels in the first half of 2003. The group started its work by an introduction to the current state of work on the educational objectives and also took into consideration policy documents and resolutions on lifelong learning. The introductory exercise was focussed on understanding all of the key issues of objectives 2.1 and 2.3 and the nine sub-objectives belonging to them. A range of proposals for possible policy priorities has been collected. The experts were invited to deliver country reports on the key issues. The major priorities and innovations of these reports were analysed by the Commission. For this raft of proposals a table for policy analysis and comparison was then set up by the Commission. The third meeting aimed at discussing and selecting priorities from the broad range of proposals. Finally a greatly reduced number of priorities had to be selected. At the last meeting in the first half of 2003 the best areas for examples of good practice were discussed and a first introduction to the analysis of good practice was illustrated by practical examples.

From the very beginning members of the working group were invited to propose examples of good practice and to add more targeted examples of good practice in the course of their work. The selection of priorities was finalized in May.

Some examples of good practice proposed by experts that did not belong to the key issues of working group G were transferred to other working group coordinators.

Relations with other working groups

The group also dealt with the indicators as proposed by the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB) on the one hand, while on the other hand group G presented its initial recommendations to the SGIB.

All working group results are important to the field of social inclusion policies, equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming as horizontal issues. The extent to which this focus was treated by the different groups differs from group to group. Working group H has made important contributions from the perspective of making learning more attractive and was thus able to bridge gaps that could not yet be covered by group G.

Active civic education has been identified as a major issue in the definition of "basic skills" in the area of social competences and partly

in the area of interpersonal, intercultural competences (group B), and was already addressed by them. Active civic education is also relevant in the field of teacher training (A) and mobility (E) (European dimension).

For all groups expert support for analytical work had been provided. Working group G however has had no such support until July 2003.

Major current initiatives in the field

Due to the delay the mapping exercise for phase 2 could not be finalized. Experts of working group G contributed to a first collection of initiatives.

In 1998, the Commission published a study on active civic education in several European countries. The most important work at international level is currently done by the Council of Europe, especially in the field of active civic education in schools. The Commission was involved in this work from the beginning and supports projects under the Socrates-Grundtvig Programme.

Results for universities, vocational training and adult education are still very limited.

The first three meetings of working group G took place during the Greek Presidency. The Greek Presidency organised a one-day seminar on active civic education in Athens after the first meeting of the directors general of adult education in Europe and a further conference of the education ministers in Nicosia on active civic education and teacher training.

Further demands to contribute to the CEDEFOP conference on lifelong learning during this period, including issues of working group G, could not be answered due to the scarce human resources of the Commission. Although this conference also intended to deal with the objectives of working group G, feed-back has not yet been possible.

The City of Vienna has one district with remarkable learning activities. The Commission desk officer of working group G participated in a one day event to strengthen the initiative, giving European policy an in-put in the process and disseminating these good practices.

DG Employment is currently working on a policy recommendation, or at least a communication, dealing with actions necessary to include persons with disabilities at all policy levels. The important proposals made by working group G so far will be incorporated in the draft version of the working document.

The work on the Convention was still in progress when working group G was dealing with stage 1 (details regarding enlarged citizenship concept which have to be developed). The importance of the gender

issue among the values and the objectives of the Convention, the social inclusion issue, and a wider notion of active civic participation will probably influence the priorities as well as the details of future recommendations from this working group.

Lifelong education and training as tools and objectives in the field of social inclusion policies, especially in the field of persons with low education and the elderly have been taken on board by DG Employment before the latest European social report was presented.

Main results

After the first meeting, group members were invited to write reports on policy achievements, current actions taken and future plans concerning objectives 2.1 and 2.3. Several reports were sent in after the first and second meeting, sometimes using reports and papers for purposes other than what they were originally intended for. Only few papers were written for this specific purpose. The Commission analysed all the texts and drew up an overview. Proposals from discussion during the first and the second meeting were also added. However, reports from some countries are still missing.

Working group G was invited to analyse and discuss the indicators proposed by the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks after its second meeting. A lively feed-back from the experts led to a presentation of a broad range of useful comments on these indicators, the methodology they are based on, and the quality of the content. Furthermore working group G agreed at its third meeting to propose several additional tools for indicating and monitoring policy progress for objectives 2.1 and 2.3.

Experts of working group G asked for more time to create indicators for objectives 2.1 and 2.3, which are rather underdeveloped so far.

There is a contradiction between highly prioritised areas like active civic participation, social inclusion, equal opportunities and open and flexible learning and the lack of appropriate data.

The quality the group is looking for is not always well-reflected in quantitative indicators. More reflection and alternative approaches are needed.

Experts proposed that better critical use of existing data collections should be made, for instance of lifelong learning indicators developed so far and specialized data collections like those on active civic participation which might be adapted.

The general trend towards more output oriented indicators is supported.

Social partners should make their own efforts to create a reliable broad data base on formal, non-formal and informal lifelong learning in the workplace. Informal learning at the work place is not yet well documented. Public services can be expected to go ahead with such statistics for their staff.

Indicators are not complex enough to distinguish the differences between advantaged and disadvantaged learners. The group therefore recommends for all indicators:

- data about vocational training for the job or on the job should be kept separate, because of the different sources of provision in comparison to other sectors of education such as civic and general education
- all indicators should be sex-disaggregated in order to allow gender mainstreaming policies to identify priority areas
- all indicators should be age-disaggregated and get a lifelong design covering the pre-school age as well as 64-plus and 80-plus
- all indicators should reflect the source of income/labour market status. The capacity to pay for learning largely depends on insight into these details
- all indicators should reflect the educational attainment, otherwise there is no possibility of making a difference between the haves and the have-nots in Europe.

Social cohesion across deprived and flourishing geographical areas should be documented by indicators (using ESF zones and their different levels?).

Indicators for social inclusion and equal opportunities have limits in different value systems and different groups encounter problems throughout the various countries.

An agreed definition of "tertiary education" is needed, as the present use is ambiguous and not at all clear.

As a supplementary tool special surveys are needed. Experts propose to provide special surveys for certain disadvantaged groups inside and outside the labour market (roma and sinti; migrants; blind persons, persons over 64).

Current measures and further steps in Austria

In Austria a white paper was produced on quality development and quality assurance for educational development not only based on recent experience with top-down tools like the PISA indicators, but also from the bottom-up approach of a national development process.

The white paper is, thus, going to provide the link between the national and the international developments which are taking place. The author of this contribution was a member of the working group that produced this white paper. This white paper has been adopted by the minister and is going to be presented to the public.

We consider the implementation of the Detailed Work Programme as a process operating in two directions. If we want to fulfil the key objectives we cannot rely solely on the work being carried out at EU level. On the contrary, it must be in the national interest not only to be closely involved in the definition of the indicators and benchmarks to be applied, but also in integrating these tools into the national political process. Indicators and benchmarks are considered as political tools and in order to ensure their careful use they should be limited in number.

Therefore, similar to the structure at EU level, we have created national working groups serving a dual function: on the one hand they provide a pool of expertise for the national representatives in the EU working groups, on the other hand they play a central role in the development of national strategies and concepts for the implementation of the work programme at the national level. The author of this text is responsible for one of these groups in which national experts are gathered. At the same time he is a delegate to the corresponding group at EU-level.

Some of the European working groups have already more or less finished their work (Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks) for the interim report due in 2004, while others such as group "G" have only just started (group "G" had its first meeting in January 2003 and one further meeting in May).

At the moment working group "G" is focussing on three tasks:

- proposals for indicators, according to the specific contents of the objectives 2.1 and 2.3
- further remarks to the core issues of the work programme
- identification and description of examples of "good practice", following the "guidelines for presenters".

The process as a whole is steered by what we call the EU steering committee composed of the directors general of the ministries of education of the European member states.

We also consider the involvement of all key players at national level as absolutely essential. This requires the participation not only of regional and local educational authorities, but also of education

institutions, other ministries, the social partners and other major stakeholders in the field of education and training.

To this effect, the Austrian minister of education organised a conference in Vienna on 4 December 2002. Information concerning the results can be found on the website of the Ministry (see references).

In October 2001 we had a workshop on benchmarks and indicators at national level.

There is ongoing information for key players in the educational system, for top administrators at the level of the Austrian provinces, for the provincial boards of education and for all inspectors all over the country.

To support the European work on objectives, Austria also hosted two "residential seminars": one on basic skills, the other on foreign languages.

In May 2003 a number of workshops for the members of the Austrian working groups were held in Vienna. The interim reports of the Austrian working groups circulated among the experts involved.

Finally, we also have to make sure that we find ways for an efficient involvement of the candidate countries in the implementation process. When we deliver our first interim report in 2004, the first accession countries will stand on the threshold of the Union's door. The sooner we cooperate with our candidate partners in our common work, the better the result will be when it comes to the test. Bearing this in mind, Austrian representatives participated in the start up conferences in our neighbouring countries.

How to go on

Among the experts responsible for EU objectives work in Austria a range of possible measures have been discussed but not yet decided upon.

Measures at the PR-level
- our web-site contains the following documents:
  - results of the working groups
  - an interactive platform for a public debate on objectives
  - other business
- wall newspaper distributed to all Austrian schools by the federal ministry
- further meetings organised by the ministry for key-persons in our educational system (inspectors, administrators, teacher trainers, policy makers, etc.)

- others.

Measures at the strategic level
- contribution to an overall concept for educational development in Europe
- creation of a system-monitoring concept at the national level to make relevant data available for school development and educational policy in Austria and Europe
- integration of PISA-results
- integration of OECD Projects such as "Schooling for Tomorrow" or "Lifelong Learning"
- integration of national and international efforts concerning quality in schools
- promotion of the national debate on benchmarks, indicators, standards in the context of international quality development
- changes to be provided in the legal framework at the national level
- preparation of an overall concept by the so called "*Zukunftskommission*" (a working group of top-experts, scientists, and administrators which coordinates and leads the different branches of educational development).

In Austria a lot of measures have been taken to translate the EU objectives-policy into our national context and further activities will take place with the aim to support this work within the framework of open coordination.

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National strategy and some elements of practice for the implementation of the Lisbon process in Hungary

Éva Balázs

Introduction

At the time when the Maastricht Treaty stated for the first time the goal of political union for the European Community and, referring to education, declared union-level competence for this field, deep political and social changes were taking place in Hungary. Since the transition process was quick, peaceful and democratic, the hope that the country could soon join the Union, seemed to be realistic. Political changes in other Eastern Central European countries that followed the Hungarian processes opened up a vision for the whole region to be an integral part of "Europe" once again. However, the growing number of candidate countries with poor economic achievement and suffering from different social and political deficits, raised new problems in the process of union-building (and led to the dilemma of widening or deepening the union), which overshadowed the promise of quick accession. Though the euphoria in the transition countries ended relatively soon after the political changes, the will to re-union has remained active until now.[1] The decade of the 90s was a very long and doubt-filled period for Hungarian society but this period was also one, in which the involvement of the country in European educational cooperation became much stronger than before. It coincided with, and was partly raised by, a new stage of the approximately two-decade process of the "Europeanisation" of education, characterised in those years by the first White Paper on education, by the first European educational policy-analysis (Blue Paper), by the European Year of Lifelong Learning in Education (1996) and by the enlargement of community programmes on issues of public education. For the accession countries 1997 was also an outstanding year because since then they could take part in community programmes. In a

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[1] And it is yielding by successful referendums in more candidate countries these months.

broader context this stage revealed the growing importance of education for the whole society.[2]

By the time of the Berlin summit, which made the decision on the enlargement of the Union, a Europe different from what had been expected was being shaped. Economic difficulties were piling up; widening social differences were threatening social cohesion. In some respects the EU could answer the challenges (e.g. the introduction of the common currency, agreeing a common employment policy, etc) but in other fields it could not or could only do so to limited extent (e.g. the reform of CAP and that of the structural funds). The approach towards a new European common educational policy is a logical consequence of the above outlined challenges, but not in the short term. The decisive role of education in the knowledge-based economy is expressed by two terms: economic competitiveness and social cohesion. They represent a specific characteristic of the European economy and society, which is very different from other competitive regions, e.g. the US and Asia. [3]

The Lisbon summit declared the new complex role of education for Europe[4] and member states and also introduced a new approach to the governing processes.[5] When the so-called Lisbon process started, Hungary (among nine other countries) was a candidate country for Union membership. It is likely that the implementation process described in the Detailed Work Programme will be achieved by Hungary as a member state of the EU.

The "state of matters" in Hungary in the context of the Lisbon process

How can Hungary – or, concentrating on the theme of this paper, Hungarian public education - join in the Lisbon goals? Outlining the main capacities and deficiencies of public education (both policy and practice) in a country is important not only for judging the scale and perspectives of its contribution to the Lisbon goals. The key issue is the manner of the process, especially the capacity to apply the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). What is firstly relevant, or can be said to be a pre-requisite to it is the *self-reflection potential* on education, the

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[2] Expressed by the new approach of lifelong learning or in the preambulum of the Amsterdam Treaty.

[3] These two terms appear in most basic EU documents.

[4] The overall conception and the main conditions of this appeared already in the 2000/C/8/04. Council Decision.

[5] About the new governing processes see G. Halász's paper in this book.

importance of which is to produce a common "language" and knowledge on educational matters for professionals and stakeholders of education and of other sectors, both in the domestic and international dimensions. This potential can serve to establish the involvement of all parties reconciling possibilities and differences on how to contribute to achieving the goals. Hungary has a fair range of ways in building on this kind of potential. Besides experiences acquired by different international collaborations in the 90s (the importance of which is mainly concerning the process of mutual learning), since 1995 a biannual[6] analytical report on public education has been published, prepared by the National Institute of Public Education. The report – which puts education processes into their broader national and international contexts - uses indicators and research outcomes, databases in its analyses and is commonly used by professionals of macro, meso and school level administration, by R&D fellows, in higher education and school management training as well as by the wider public. So it gives a common reference to agents, stakeholders and partners in education having different interests and responsibilities. Since the report is regularly published in English it is also suitable for international discussion and cooperation.

The "immanent position" of the educational sector in Hungary can be described by some basic characteristics that display both the advantages and shortcomings of OMC capacities. First, the general features of administration - *decentralisation, deregulation*, and appearance of *market elements* - are very similar to the European mainstream and these can contribute to applying the method of OMC.[7] Local stakeholders, schools and teachers themselves have a wide range of autonomy, some of which could be experienced even before the political changes in the country, giving more continuity in this field than in other social sectors (Fiszbein et al., 2001). The nature of regulation not only respects but, all be it in an indirect way, prescribes autonomy, pre-activity and the involvement of other stakeholders in many areas of education. Just a few examples will serve to illustrate this:

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[6] From 2002 the report is a tri-annual publication.
[7] Other characteristics like the average indicators of attainments (participation, drop-outs, transition, pupil achievement) and the culture of everyday practice also connect the country to Europe.

- the implementation of the reform of the content of the curricula requires the preparation of a so-called local (in reality the basic school-level) pedagogical programme (LPP), including syllabus.[8]
- choosing textbooks and teaching methods are the teachers' responsibilities but in accepting them, parents also have their rights
- offering and modifying training programmes in secondary vocational schools dependent on the choice of the schools, but local social and economic needs can influence this
- concerning the financial system, more areas of education are supported not by direct allocation but by other means, such as an application system, which needs to fit the requirements
- involving partners in a broader context of education, a territorial education planning system has been operating in Hungary since 1996 and local planning requirements were added to this tool in 1999.

Looking at this short list it can be added that the work of many elements does not fill the space given for operation or that it sometimes causes contradictions. Citing only selective examples, raising the participation of families in education is less successful with parents suffering social deprivation whilst the activities of families with high cultural capital in choosing an education supply (both within and without the school system) contribute to the growing inequalities experienced by some schools. There are cases when a wider and common commitment of families and of the public can even impede necessary changes.[9] Keeping the involvement and innovation capacity of the teaching staff in the preparation of LPP is hard because the modifications of content regulation requires them to prepare the school-level programme in Hungary for the third time since 1995. It is not easy to adapt to additional financial mechanisms when preferences change within a short period – a situation that can hinder long-term building. The mid-term educational plans do not fit the new, but already existing, territorial development planning system, which is to receive the financial support of EU structural funds and there is lack of information communication among the planning professionals of education and other sectors.

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[8] School Councils (with participation of families and local society) have rights in the process.

[9] The over large and frittering infrastructure with diminishing number of pupils causes efficiency problems. It can be handled by education policy-makers at both central and local levels because of frequent resistance of the public in the case of closing a school or deconstructing the network of schools.

Meantime, decentralisation not only allows but also supports building *learning capacity* and developing *potential of adaptability,* which are important conditions for implementing the Lisbon process. One such field that can be emphasized in this respect is the school management training system, the modernisation of which can be considered as a strong potential that can widen the range of influence in managing OMC. Another one is the secondary vocational education sub-sector where comprehensive modernisation was already taking place in the 90s.[10] While the former can initiate new kinds of partnerships mainly with different agents of local society, the latter can fulfil a new mediating role between education and the economy, appropriate for the expectations of the knowledge-based society. The willingness to adapt and remain open to change and the use of OMC remains a strong feature of the country. This can also be illustrated by its participation in areas of European collaboration. Between 1998 and 2001 713 public education institutions participated in EU Comenius programmes, a number which represents two thirds of the secondary schools in Hungary.

Openness is a prime characteristic of OMC and it cannot fulfil its function without it. There are other sectors partly within and partly outside education, capable of contributing to a new kind of coordination in developing education. The growing number of non-governmental organizations is a resource of education able to mediate between the professional and civic approaches on the one hand, and between social and market interests on the other.[11] Market elements in education also colour the picture. Some of them are operated by the control of central education policy (e.g. market of school textbooks, quality assurance, professional services) but they can also be competitors of education supply offered by the state (foundation schools, adult education agencies). In some cases the state invites the market sector to participate in achieving important education policy-goals (quality management of schools and local maintainers).

Supporting the potential of adaptability and openness, growing *networking* activities can also be emphasized. Networks in education have been growing in Hungary since the 90s. Besides those that are supported by the state (Tempus Office, Comenius Quality Development Programme), there is a fairly wide range of professional networks in the

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[10] With a World Bank loan.

[11] The NGOs are very active in the field of lifelong learning but they take part in many other activities that can be connected to human resources development.

field (Self-Developing Schools[12], professional and civic associations). Their involvement in the Lisbon process is perceptible.

Concerning such concrete fields of OMC as *transparency* and *measurability*, preparing and using indicators in education, Hungary takes part in these tasks through different ways and means. Besides the international cooperation of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (abbreviated in Hungarian as KSH), the Ministry of Education (MoE) and professional institutions maintained by the Ministry take part in different international indicator programmes. The country has provided data for EURYDICE since 1998. The MoE regularly delegates representatives to the EU Indicator Programme (Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning). Hungary takes part also in OECD indicator activities. Under the political responsibility of the MoE, the Kiss Árpád Public Education Service Institution is responsible for INES network A, The Hungarian Institute for Educational Research for network B and the National Institute of Public Education for network C.

Summarizing the above outlined dimensions and examples, the relation of the Hungarian education system to OMC cannot be characterized only by the fact that the method is acceptable but also by the statement that the national processes show potential for the application of this method.

The national strategy for the implementation of the Lisbon process

In describing the grounds for the implementation strategy, the main question is whether the country's immanent goals are in harmony with the desirable goals of the EU, and to what extent. It can be said that the fundaments of the development strategy in Hungarian public education are fully identical with the Lisbon goals. What is more, the Lisbon objectives themselves strengthen the main national policy efforts in education. The twin-goals of economic competitiveness and social cohesion broadly agree with the aims of the society and these goals are at the centre of the human resources development chapter of the National Strategic Plan. Legal changes in education prepared recently also contribute to these goals.[13] Among schools there are a few that, after

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[12] This network has been built spontaneously by participants of a SOROS Foundation programme that supported preparation of LPPs in schools.

[13] Growing inequalities and threats of social inclusion were perceived through the last decade and the so-called "PISA-shock" was revealed recently, which drew attention to these issues.

several years of forced restriction, have huge financial resources at their command. Such is the reform in the technical school sector, which aims at the modernisation of this area regarding the demands of the new economy, and at the same time deals with the problems of social inclusion.[14] Others are the new national foreign language strategy and the development of the physical infrastructure of schools, including ICT-infrastructure, with the contribution of the new Phare programme. Both of them address and serve the issue of competitiveness regarding social inequalities. The present EU activities (E-learning, lifelong learning and quality assurance programmes for example) in Hungary are coordinated with the activities connected directly to the Lisbon process.

The Hungarian strategy prepared for the fulfilment of the Detailed Work Programme, is in harmony with the Commission paper and calendar. As the Lisbon goals are not only seen as relevant but are accepted by different agents of education, and by society as a whole, the strategic core for Hungary is not how to convince people to achieve these goals but how to make a synergy in the sometimes separate processes of striving after the same or similar goals.

Since governmental level should take responsibility for the Lisbon process within the member states, the tasks of strategic planning and coordination among national and international activities and participation in the process fell to the Ministry of Education. The governmental involvement in the implementation of the Lisbon strategy was supported by the sixth conference of education ministers in Bratislava, July 2002, where, with Hungarian participation, the Detailed Work Programme was discussed and many details were provided for national strategies.

Because the implementation involves cooperation with most other sectors, an important dimension of strategic activity for the MoE was to improve relationships and communications and to *build cross-sectoral cooperation* with other ministries in the areas affected by the process.[15] It was partly based on previously developed contacts with the Prime Minister's Office responsible for territorial development and others. Connected directly to the Detailed Work Programme, cooperation was

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[14] This school type is where the losers of (the expansion of) secondary education can be found.

[15] The cross-sectoral governmental cooperation is traditionally weak in Hungary. Stronger efforts of the MoE for expressing and harmonising interests started to be made in the late 90s in connection with the preparation for accepting structural funds, mainly social funds.

initiated by the MoE with ministries that had responsibilities and competence in the different fields of the main objectives. In the first phase of the Detailed Work Programme effective partnership operates between the Ministry of Employment and Labour (regarding employment policy), the Ministry of the Interior and with the Ministry of Children, Youth and Sport Affairs (regarding mobility issues). Relations between public education and vocational training in Hungary are possible because these sub-sectors have been administered by the same ministry since 1996.

A minor but not subsidiary circumstance of the implementation strategy, which influenced the strategy itself, was that of *time pressure*, caused partly by the late approval of the accession of the country to the EU and partly by the tight agenda of the Detailed Work Programme. It therefore became imperative to find those partners (both local and national) who could expand the scale of influence of implementation and involve all possible players in the process. Externally the experiences of other countries (Austria, Poland, Germany) in solving strategic problems were taken into account by MoE visits to these countries

An urgent aspect of the strategic plan was the establishment of *eight expert groups* representing Hungary in international working committees, dealing with the professional preparation of the implementation process and preparing outcomes for the end of the first phase of it. The groups (that were organized by the EU initiatives around the objectives of the Detailed Work Programme in a combined way) are as follows:

(A) improving education and training for teachers and trainers (objective 1.1)

(B) basic skills, foreign language teaching and learning, spirit of enterprise (objectives 1.2, 3.3. and 3.2)

(C) ICT in teaching and training (objective 1.3)

(D) increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies (objective 1.4)

(E) making the best use of resources (objective 1.5)

(F) mobility and exchanges, European cooperation (objectives 3.4 and 3.5)[16]

(G) open learning environment, active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion (objectives 2.1 and 2.3)

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[16] This group is the most complex one, having three sub-sections, dealing with specific issues of mobility in higher education, vocational training and public education and suggesting indicators for these fields.

(H) making learning attractive, strengthening links with working life and research and society at large (objectives 2.2 and 3.1)

(I) a ninth group was established to take part in the work of the European group dealing with a horizontal theme, preparing indicators for all the affected areas.

The groups were formed in late 2002 and started their work on the agenda of the EU coordinators of working committees, representing the Directorate for Education and Youth. Officials of the MoE were designated to organizing and coordinating the work of expert groups. The coordination of the work is done by the Department for International Cooperation and Strategic Planning; the chief officer of the department reports on the work to the meeting of the minister regularly.

The members of the expert groups are distinguished professionals, representing higher education, research, policy-making and practice. To ensure that OMC can fulfil its function, other stakeholders were also invited by the MoE to take part in the work. NGOs and civic associations were also invited to delegate experts to several working groups (e.g. teacher quality, mobility and exchange), in some others they were requested to form opinions on professional analyses and working materials. All groups have a representative of the MoE for the European working committee (they are partly researchers, partly officers of MoE) and a secretary (MoE officer) to support the representatives' work and to organize national activities. The tasks of the expert groups are twofold. The EU level activities are described by the European Committee and their fulfilment depends considerably on the EU coordinators of the working committees who initiate the detailed working schedule. The national tasks generally follow those of the EU but there are specific national level tasks, common to all groups. These are the following:

- establishing and operating the group
- preparing and updating a national working plan connected to the schedule of the committees coordinated in Brussels
- identifying different types of tasks in the given group (data analysis, adopting and representing national points of view in strategic issues, giving feedback on international contributions to national processes, participation in preparing indicators of the fields affected by the work of the group, gathering "best practices" and presenting them)
- organizing study trips and peer reviews
- keeping contacts with target and participating institutions
- translating and disseminating professional materials
- preparing and disseminating information materials and professional papers

- electronic communication.

To obtain information and improve the process of implementation, the department of the MoE responsible for coordination, has prepared a common framework for the expert groups. The elements of this framework consist of a list of terminology, disseminated to all experts, a common structure and form of travel reports, including a detailed report on the following tasks and agreements; similarly another one for reports on best practices and best policies. Progress reports also have a common structure.

To support information communication both among professionals and among the wider public, Tempus Hungary (a public foundation, the national administrative centre of community programmes in education, responsible for organization, following and evaluating these activities, established by the ministry) was asked to get involved. Both Tempus and OKI (National Institute of Public Education) are responsible for publicizing the issue.

The first steps of implementation

The first time the implementation of the Lisbon strategy was publicized to a wide audience in Hungary was in February 2003 at a national conference under the title of the Detailed Work Programme document. Possible agents of the process were invited by the organizers, Tempus and OKI. More than 50% of the approximately 300 participants came from the practice of education (2/3 of them from public education and training, 1/3 from higher education), 10% were representatives of research and development institutes, 20% school maintainers and educational supporting institutions, 15% were MoE fellows). Experts of the eight groups also participated.

The aims of the conference were threefold: to distribute information, discussing tasks and ideas as well as preparing implementation by involving all partners in the process. The introductory speeches of the conference were given by top administrators of Hungarian and EU education policy: by Mr Medgyes, a secretary of state of the MoE, Hungary and Mr Haug, DG for Education and Youth, of the European Commission. The structure of the conference followed the main strategic objectives of the Detailed Work Programme, organized in forms of plenary lectures, parallel sessions and discussion forums on key issues. The reports of sessions and discussion groups were summarized in a plenary form. Experiences of foreign countries were also shared with the audience by two experts from Austria and Poland.

The main outcome of the conference was the conclusion that the Detailed Work Programme could be accepted for the professional public as a possible set of tools for Hungarian educational development and was not perceived as a pressure by the EU for a "strange" goal. The conference started the operation of the implementation in a broader context than the fields of activity outlined by the ministry and expert groups. Some present and future tasks were formulated behind the strategic objectives and there were discussions on the working methods. Some programmes of the conference, especially the open discussions on key themes, such as quality, effectiveness and efficiency in education, identified participants who could be active agents for the future processes of implementation. The conference gathered ideas on contributions to the international evaluation process and on the special needs expressed by different agents. Among the possible fields of contribution to cross-national analysis, considering the affected agents, were teacher training and in-service training in Hungary. These were put on the agenda as a theme for "peer review" or a possible example of "best practice". It was also stated that at the national level experiences should be exchanged on the way nations deal with their national problems. As stated before, the PISA results caused a professional and social shock in Hungary, therefore it was natural that a deep need emerged regarding a mutual international analysis on social and pedagogical backgrounds behind the poor achievement of the country in PISA (e.g. by exchanging experiences of teaching-learning methodologies with countries that performed outstandingly in PISA). Investigating different sectoral policies and practices of those countries having low standard deviation among student achievements, a phenomenon that is the opposite of the Hungarian experience, was also a field requiring international mutual learning.

Some concerns on the implementation also appeared in the conference, expressed by people involved in educational practice and local administration. Among them the following can be emphasized:
- the lack of a strong connection between distinct activities on different levels can weaken the results
- some debates are directed towards how to involve cross-sectoral partners in the implementation on the basis of a common activity which was previously poorly organised among the different sectors
- some doubts can arise on how to make a compromise between accountability and transparency, namely between building tools for taking a EU-wide responsibility and at the same time giving freedom for local proceedings

- a round-table discussion, which focussed on the main challenges of the Lisbon strategy in relation to Hungary, agreed that the hardest task to fulfil is probably to increase the access of all to education and training (the second objective). The measurable weaknesses, such as foreign language competence or ICT-culture, can be handled by conscious policy-making and focussed implementation but supporting equal opportunities is much more difficult to deal with in a goal directed way. Gaps in social cohesion need to be handled by joint forces and it is likely that many losers in the transformation period of society as a whole cannot be winners in the process by the year 2010. Polarization of education, mainly in higher and secondary sectors, may temporarily increase after joining the EU due to the Bologna process and accreditation systems.

Another set of activities was the organization of the means of *communication* in the implementation process. As was said, coordinating information communication among expert groups and other professionals is carried out by the MoE, supported by the Tempus Foundation Office. The wider audience can get regular information on the matters from a national professional periodical, *Új Pedagógiai Szemle* (New Pedagogical Review). In the first phase of the implementation the translated working plan and the main lectures of the above-mentioned conference were published in the spring of 2003. The audience that can be reached this way is fairly broad since this periodical is issued in 3,700 copies, has approximately 10,000 readers at all levels of education and a wider audience due to the fact that it has also a website having 45,000 visitors per month. The periodical undertook to regularly publish all the relevant professional materials of the working groups, to issue interim reports on the progress achieved, to give information on current events, and intends to follow the processes from the point of view of everyday life.[17]

The first half year of the Hungarian *expert groups' work* shows a rather mixed picture.[18] In four groups:
(A) improving education and training for teachers and trainers

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[17] The EU section of the periodical is one of the most popular columns of the paper.
[18] It is caused mainly by the calendar of the Detailed Work Programme (Annex 2), which schedules launching different objectives at different times. But there are deviations from the planned dates in both positive and negative directions.

(B) (B) basic skills, foreign language teaching and learning, spirit of enterprise;

(C) (C): ICT issues

(D) (F): mobility and exchanges, European cooperation,

there were clear initiatives by the EU, on the base of which a detailed schedule could be prepared at national level, which paved the way for Hungarian participants to contribute to the processes. Furthermore, theoretical and research background of the groups is strong in working groups A, B and C, which apparently played some role in establishing the conceptual base for the work that could be achieved. However, the tasks of the groups include different concrete activities, in accordance with what was addressed to them internationally, therefore the intensity and depth of both activities and present achievements of the group work are also rather divergent. In the theme of Hungarian teacher training and in-service training system (organized in group A) a comprehensive analysis was made by the international expert committee, which intensified national activities. The analysis was based on a national background report. Several institutions of three levels (policy-making, research and praxis) were surveyed by field visits, organized by the MoE representative and other members of the group. The EU report, including a SWOT analysis on the Hungarian system, together with the Hungarian background report and materials of the altogether eight "best practices", is one of the newest professional analyses in the field, and is also appropriate for national development in the near future in the view of the MoE experts. Hungary also contributed to the (altogether eight) "best practice" examples of teacher training and re-training. The achievements of group F are more than promising. In the theme of mobility and European exchange the European Commission asked Hungary to gather "best practices" and present a national analytical report. The nine documents on these themes and the report were also prepared by a fruitful cooperation of a wide range of social sectors and interest groups. The third expert group, the work of which can be considered to be successful in Hungary, is group B. This group takes responsibility for Hungarian activities of two important objectives of this phase of the Detailed Work Programme: surveying and analysing the teaching of skills for the knowledge society (objective 1.2) and foreign language skills (objective 3.3). Besides the expertise available in this group the work is strengthened by the fact that the themes are challenging for Hungarian education policy as well. This group was not asked to prepare a national report; gathering, exchanging best practices and initiating indicators should be done in the international expert committee with Hungarian contribution. Experts take part in the preparation of the action plan of

the EU for teaching foreign languages, based on the discussion paper of the European Committee "Supporting foreign language learning and language diversity", so that in this phase of implementation experiences of Hungarian developments can be taken into consideration. Fairly elaborated "good policy practices" are being produced by Hungary in three other themes: one, in "Integrating ICT in education and initial vocational training", two, in the theme of "Developing skills for the knowledge society and for lifelong learning". Disseminating these experiences to the wider audience is inevitable.

In some groups the implementation is in the begin phase of making arrangements on the matter. Some delay will probably not cause serious problems in the perspectives of the Lisbon process but there are areas in which the lack of development can hinder the Hungarian processes, which would need international support. Such is the working area of group E "Making the best use of resources" and group H "Making learning attractive, strengthening links with working life and research and society at large".

Evaluation on OMC in the first phase of implementation

In the first phase of the implementation the "workability" of the Open Method of Coordination is especially important. Workability means the effective use of tools, offered by OMC and practised in this phase, but besides this, it also means a special way of working among professionals of different areas (among different working groups) and among representatives of professional, administrative and policy sides (including education and other sectors) both within a country and at national and EU level.

As to the work of OMC tools, the former examples show that it could be "tested" in expert groups that had many tasks concerning national contributions to the objectives of the Detailed Work Programme. These groups could try out a broad set of tools. Their workability in this phase of the implementation process was proved by the contribution of different stakeholders and many agents of the issue that the groups dealt with. OMC in a "monothematic" group like "Improving education and training for teachers and trainers" (group A), involved mainly a defined professional background, but the involvement included a wide range of levels affected by the subject. Various activities and the need to prepare an overall report on the theme with active Hungarian contribution resulted in getting good examples of mutual learning and has resulted in

a usable output for self-evaluation of the country and for making recommendations for future actions to the EU.

Much depended on the success of both sides. In Hungary the self-evaluation potential of the field is fairly strong. The composition of experts in the national working group was balanced regarding the representatives of professionals (research and higher education) and policy-administrators. There was good cooperation with different institutions, visits of representatives who obtained information and feedback on their contribution and work. The EU-side was characterized by a well-prepared working agenda, by clear expectations and by a coordinator of the working committee who was professional and effective in management methods. Another good example of the workability of OMC could be perceived in the group F "Mobility and exchanges, European cooperation". Professional and organizational precedents do not exist in this field but deep involvement in the matter, growing expertise and recent institution-building made it possible to contribute effectively to the work of this group. Besides gathering best practices, preparing a national report was also expected here; it was drawn up by wide cross-sectoral cooperation including representatives of education, training and other sectors as well as many agents of the state and civil sphere.

Some groups (the working committees of which did not have clear aims or the deadline for which did not prescribe intensive working at that stage) could not try these tools. Some members of these groups trying to be pro-active could not "channel" their efforts into a common stream. So the workability of OMC in these cases needs to be judged in the longer term.

More debates arose on applying OMC as a way of working among different professional fields and between professional, political and the administrative "sides" of implementation. In the former, lack of horizontal communication among different working groups was caused by their separated coordinative framework, managerial support and by time-pressure. Informal communication could sometimes solve this problem but could not support getting synergy in attached issues. In the latter, debate came less from communication among the three sides but rather from some uncertainty on the share of different responsibilities.

According to the working plan, the first phase of the implementation aims at obtaining experiences on the practices of national education policies and, using it as a base, making proposals for future

developments. This branch of work was grounded by professional experts. Officers of policy-administration partly managed (coordinated, supported and organized) this work and partly took part in it. Internationally this implementation was coordinated by the DG for Education and Youth of the European Commission. The outcomes of this phase are to support preparing recommendations for the European Council by the Commission, which gives them political legitimacy, on the base of which future actions can be initiated in order to achieve the Lisbon goals. After accepting political recommendations, administrative bodies are to have a key role in this third phase.

Though theoretically there are three phases that can be characterised by taking key responsibilities of three sides, it is clear that without a continuous cooperation among professionals, politicians and administrators (which is a specific feature of OMC) the success of the whole process is doubtful. The perspectives to accept the professional recommendations depend on the successful involvement of national policy-making sphere even in the first phase. On the other hand the lack of professional preparation could hinder forming political opinion on crucial issues. Considering the Detailed Work Programme, the national representatives of the EU working committees should fulfil a mediating role between professionals and political bodies. Fulfilling this role is important in the first phase of implementation because expressing national standpoints in the (international) working committees is expected by the EU.

In half of the Hungarian national expert groups MoE officials were designated to be the representatives of the international working committees. They could generally mediate better between professional experts and political bodies but representatives with an academic background voiced doubts as to the legitimacy of their work. Administrative and managerial support was, and is, being given for their work but harmonising different interests depended mainly on how urgent the tasks were for politicians. Where the EU committee did not have clear criteria on work and/or there was not a detailed task for Hungary, there was no point in initiating discussions with politicians for expressing a national standpoint. As mentioned before, in many cases it is not a serious problem for Hungary because national public education policy efforts are largely harmonious with the Lisbon goals. But Hungarian experiences can point out that the perspectives of the following phases of implementing the Lisbon goals depend more on working OMC among different interest groups than on the tools of the process.

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Helmut Bachmann was born in Austria in 1954. Passing the studies at the Teachers Training College in Vienna he became a teacher in a secondary school (German/manual crafts) in 1977. Besides working as a teacher he studied political science and pedagogic at the University of Vienna and he obtained his doctoral degree after delivering his thesis in1989. Because of his participation in reform projects he was invited to work in the Provincial School Board of Vienna as pedagogical expert in the field of school development (1984-1988). He was member of the Federal Ministry of Education and the Arts as an expert within the department for civic education (1988-1991). He became a member of the Centre for School Development (also department of newly structured Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture) and representative of the head of that institution in 1991. He was a specialist in school autonomy (project leader of a study on this topic "Towards a better School"), on decision-making on autonomy, concerning democratic development of schools. He gathered experience in representing the interests of parents as president of Carinthian Parents Association (1993-1997). He founded a private company dealing with communication and social consultation (besides his job in the department of school development). A part of his work was dedicated to system development and change management in South Eastern Countries. In 2002 he came back to Vienna to work on additional tasks (European Union-objectives-policy, PISA-Steering) within the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Department for Research, Planning, Quality-Development and International Cooperation).

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He has published many articles in various periodicals and books on education and education policies, social problems and trade unionism.

Gábor Halász

Gábor Halász is director-general of the National Institute of Public Education in Budapest, Hungary. He also lectures on education science as a professor of the University of Miskolc. His research areas are education policy and administration, comparative and international education, and the theory of education systems. He has worked as an expert consultant for a number of international organizations, particularly OECD, the World Bank, and the Council of Europe. He represents Hungary in the Governing Board of OECD-CERI since 1996. As an education policy advisor, he has taken an active part in the process of educational change in Hungary since the late 1980s.

Hans Hooghoff

Hans Hooghoff (1945) is senior curriculum advisor at The Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development SLO. Before that he taught law and political education in senior secondary education. His areas of expertise include curriculum policy and innovation, school development and teaching and learning strategies. He is also the project manager of a programme for Capacity Building in South Africa. From 1997 to 1998, he was visiting professor of 'internationalisation' at the School of Education of Nagoya University in Japan. As Chief Executive Officer of the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE) he is closely involved in the construction of networks and exchange of knowledge between educational institutions in Europe. He has written a series of curriculum publications, participated in international conferences and seminars and his articles are published in various international journals.

Gaby Hostens

Gaby Hostens was born in 1945 (Belgium). He graduated in German languages from the Catholic University of Leuven in 1967 and worked as an English teacher until 1987. He became the principal of a secondary

school with a student body consisting mainly of young immigrants in 1987. He was an advisor to the Flemish minister of education and became his deputy chief of staff and chief of staff from 1992 to 1995. He was appointed director-general for secondary education in the Flemish community in 1991.

Gaby Hostens became a member of the OECD education committee in 1994 and acted as chairman from 1997 till 2000. He was a member of the INES (Indicators of Education Systems) steering group from 1997 until 2000. He is still chairman of the OECD Strategic Management Group. Most recently, he became a member of the informal group of director generals of EU countries who give strategic guidance to the Commission and the Council. He worked as a consultant to the Open Society Institute and the World Bank.

Nicholas Iliadis

Nicholas Iliadis was born in 1948 (Greece). He has a Ph.D. in Industrial Education, Organization and Management and Technology Education, A.G.S. (Advanced Graduate Specialist) in Industrial Education, Organization and Management and Technology Education, Master in Civil Engineering (Structures) and a Diploma in Civil Engineering.

He was a representative of the Greek Government to the Administrative Committee of CEDEFOP, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education (1989-1993) and was Special Secretary of the Ministry of Education responsible for all the Technological Education Institutes (TEI) of Greece (1989-1991). He was also a representative of the Ministry of Education to the Greek Permanent Representation at the European Community (1991-1992), a member of the Administrative Committee of the Organization for School Construction (OSK) 1992-1993 and 1995-2000 and was member of the Executive Committee of CIDREE 1998-2001. At the moment he is linked to the Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of National Education and Religion and is counsellor to the Minister as a member of the Departments of Vocational Education, Evaluation, In-service teacher training, General Education, responsible for civil engineering education in technical schools in Greece, and for technological education within the framework of general education for all general education schools in the country.

Lars Bo Jakobsen

Lars Bo Jakobsen is employed by the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture. Here he coordinates work on indicators and benchmarks.
The Prime Ministers Office and the Ministry of Education in Denmark have previously employed Lars Bo Jakobsen.
Lars Bo Jakobsen is co-author of "Self-evaluation in European Schools: a story of change", and he has contributed to "Skolens rummelighed – fra idé til handling".

Tom Leney

Tom Leney is responsible for international research and development at the UK government's Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. QCA is a non-governmental body with responsibility for the school curriculum and qualifications in England and with wide responsibilities for vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
Tom Leney has a broad background in education and training - as teacher, researcher, trainer and manager. He is also UK coordinator for CEDEFOP's knowledge management system for VET – ReferNet, and a research associate at the Institute of Education in London. He has worked extensively on European projects - researching, for example, European trends of convergence and divergence in education and training for the European Commission and, most recently, writing a Scenarios Toolkit (to be published late in 2003) for CEDEFOP. Current interests include the effects of the new framework for European education and training policy and the impacts of enlargement. A recurrent theme in his research is the impact of education and training on the transitions that young people make between schooling and higher education or work. Tom lives in London and can be contacted on leneyt@qca.org.uk.

Jos Letschert

Jos Letschert is member of the management team of the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development SLO. He has special responsibility for primary education.
Letschert started his educational career as a primary teacher. He holds a teaching degree in Art education for secondary education and has worked as an educationalist and project manager in various national and international innovation projects.

Letschert is a founding member of the European association for Educational Design (EED). This association focuses on the development of contemporary and coherent didactic approaches in education, based on the storyline approach to learning and teaching, originally developed in Scotland. He is also one of the founding members of the Netherlands Expertise Centre for Curriculum Studies NECCS, a cooperation between Twente University and SLO.

In 1998 he obtained his doctoral degree (PhD) at Utrecht University with a study on the development of a core content in Dutch primary education. Letschert holds the SLO-chair at Twente University on curriculum studies for basic education.

Bart Maes, Gaston Moens, Nicole Raes, Chris Van Woensel

Bart Maes, Gaston Moens, Nicole Raes, Chris Van Woensel are advisors at the Department of Educational Development, Ministry of Education in Flanders. They are members of the working groups on the Detailed Work Programme. In that capacity they were asked to provide a description of the activities of those working groups.

Roger Standaert

Roger Standaert was born in Belgium in 1945. He studied educational sciences at the Catholic University of Leuven. He worked as a lecturer in teacher training colleges, before being appointed as national coordinator of a large scaled innovation project in Flanders on comprehensive education. He finalized his doctoral dissertation on a comparative study about education policy in Europe in 1989. In 1991 he was appointed the director of the new installed Department of Education Development (DVO) in Flanders. From 1998 onwards he teaches comparative and international Education at the university of Ghent. At the moment he is the president of CIDREE.