



Flash Report

Equipping Adults for 21st Century

Joining Forces for Action on Skills and Competences

Adult learning no longer an option but a must

The conference brought together representatives from most of the stakeholder groups that should be joining forces to provide comprehensive learning opportunities for adults, in order to equip them with the necessary skills and competences for the 21st century. Employers' representation was thin on the ground and their noticeable absence was also the basis for a recurrent preoccupation of the conference, namely how to better include employers and the workplace as a central feature of adult learning.

Minister Pavalkis set the scene by underlining that despite the obvious need for adults to learn in order to achieve the EU2020 strategy and goals, the sector is not reaching its full potential. Recent international data and research now give us the facts on which to base concrete actions, which the conference set out to define more clearly. He stressed the need to balance personal and social with economic needs, and the need to tailor adult learning to the situation in individual countries as the outcomes of general and higher education are not equal across countries.

Main Actions

Both the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and Unesco Grale presentations highlighted the need for lifelong learning to overcome basic skills gaps and as a way to further skill development and learning, enjoyed currently only by higher skilled cohorts particularly as part of their work and reading outside work.

Second chance offers must be increased and the quality of such offers expanded. Quality and professionalization of teachers is *sine qua non* in this.

Clearly embed adult learning in development strategies and plans, starting with the highest level, such as EU2020. Frameworks (NQFs/EQF) should be sharpened, and in the future stages of development all countries should ensure that they incorporate qualifications acquired through NFIL.

Digital skills as a way to inclusion should be better appreciated in the adult learning equation, but this needs literacy and numeracy skills to underpin it. New media are important going forward and Korea, where 20% of adult learning is online, can be a source of inspiration.

Most people have or have access to the hardware but do not necessarily use it. The availability of the right digital textbook software is therefore an important aspect (e.g. Maths app – Maths Everywhere, UK).

Schools need to be fixed as they are the root cause of low skilled adults. Holistic policymaking is thus required, which does not only look at part of the problem. This is also true given that the need for adult learning kicks in at different stages for different clients – early school leavers might need it from 15 while young adults who go on to tertiary education much later and, in a very different form and context, employees or older people also have their specific needs. However, when planning, the life-course has to be taken into consideration in order to enable the reallocation of adequate

funding. Recent data now provide the basis for doing this in EU17 with more countries on stream.

Europe cannot afford a persistent skills underclass. It is time to move the needle. When we address basic skills, for many it means providing life skills for the next 20 to 50 years.

Many of the groups most in need are concentrated in specific areas, rural or in cities. They are in a low skills trap, but as PISA shows they are also a social underclass in which poor performance is passed from generation to generation. Closing the skills gap also means closing a social gap. This should be tackled by targeting families, starting with parents and getting them involved in helping their children, while in fact helping themselves. Finding and reaching these pockets is crucial for policy as is adapting provision to their place and time.

Strong basic skills should be a prerequisite for VET and where not previously assured by school, embedding basic skills in VET and continuing vocational training should be part and parcel of the provision.

Need to cut across policy areas in order to develop adult learning – education, employment, business where much work is needed. It may help when something is prescribed at EU level.

In any case, real change of culture and support for change must come from the highest level. While DG EAC is trying to encourage national coordinators and coordination, this is only a start. To be really effective it should be pitched much higher. A NC sitting in an unit responsible for adult education does not have the clout to bring together relevant actors from the ministries of education, employment, health and the treasury to name but a few. French PM has made literacy a National cause in 2013 and has had nationwide impact.

Policy is extremely linked to national contexts, our future work should move in the direction of supporting and encouraging this and including the local and regional grassroots development. The borderline between general and VET, between employability and social and civic is artificial and also a cause of barriers when we try to draw lines and divide into silos. Pieces have to be brought together in lifelong a perspective with supporting strategies.

- Work therefore on developing new forms of mixed governance that brings all parts of the puzzle together. Having the power to cross ministries but also reach down to all levels.
- Advocate surely, but dig into the rich data and make action happen.
- Work more intensively on using the data now available and use this to identify gaps and continue to gather more.
- Mobilise providers to collect information on the impact of learning on their clients and on who we need to reach.
- Mainstream ICT in how we do things.
- Use European Agenda to make things happen; it encompasses the priorities.
- Target resources at the most vulnerable.
- Value the learning outcomes of NFIL, they will never to equal unless included in NQFs.
- Start work on improving the skills and competences of parents in order to overcome social inequalities.
- Use mid-term review of EU/ET2020 to position adult learning and basic skills more to the forefront and reconsider existing benchmarks.

Outcomes of the workshops

Placing literacy and basic skills at the forefront

- Necessary to respond to country specific needs
- Strategies can lead to campaigns □ campaigns can lead to strategies
- Local, regional, national, European level = all levels
- Good practice examples: France, Ireland, Slovenia
- Focus on very low skilled → Breaking heritage of social disadvantage
- Involving learners, ask them what they need
- Learning by doing – literacy embedded in various contexts
- Quality provision is crucial - continuous training of teachers
- Digital society requires new competences – motivation

The Wider and Civic Benefits of increasing Participation in Adult Learning

- Evidence is there but insufficient connection to concrete benefits
- Evidence based on longer term data and regular monitoring should be available
- More research needs to be made on the (non) learners specific needs
- More learner input is required to define needs and motivations
- More flexibility in the training delivery
- IGL a possible solution, but specific conditions required for successful learning and impact
- Systematic collection of data by learning providers on the impact on the learner's situation
- National Agencies should also be involved in the monitoring of specific actions
- Availability /exchange of information between learners and providers ("brokerage" tools)
- Learners should be mobilised into associations to better expressed their needs
- At EU level, longer term priorities should be defined (beyond the political horizons)

Quality, efficiency and equity: the framing elements for funding adult learning

Recommendations on priority areas and indicators for integrating equity

- Accessibility of programmes and services
 - Level of access
 - Proportion of provision made flexibly available
 - Presence of different support schemes, including financial support
- Employers as enablers of adult learning for employed / unemployed
 - Directly for employees
 - Through financing / time for employees
 - Work-based learning / internships / apprenticeships for unemployed in co-operation with public authorities

Recommendations on priority areas and indicators for ensuring equity

- Added value of adult learning
 - Individual and society-level learning outcomes
 - Mechanisms to make learning visible – e.g. validation; NQF
- Partnership at different levels

- Existence of partnerships at different levels
- Stakeholders involved

Partnership and Coordination

Governance strategies and structures

- Recognise that Adult Learning and Education is a cross-over discipline that includes several governmental structures with proper coordination;
- The main role of AL Agenda coordinator should focus on the involvement and coordination of work of different ministries and stakeholder in a structural dialogue and the impact could be achieved with proper use of the ESF.
- Instead of developing something new, strengthen existing national cooperation mechanisms by building capacities at national level, however the question of funding needs to be solved.

Involvement of civil society and other partners

- Funds should be made available for the capacity building for civil society and social partners, including the umbrella organisations. This should be done by respecting the region specificity and need to involve umbrella organisations in the governance;
- When defining the ESF priorities, AL and the civil society should play important role;
- Civil society, including learners, should be represented in different councils and committees;
- Countries should be clustered according to learning needs and strength of the civil society and involve them in the peer learning exercise;

Higher priority to:

- Joy of learning – education should not be reduced to an instrument. AE has the right to exist next to VET and HE;
- Make inventory of the current provision and then to have more targeted and coordinated approach with significant impact;
- Make the carrier guidance service flexible and available when the adult would need it (even after usual working hours).