

**Brussels, August 2018 - LLLP Response to the second package of measures for creating a European Education Area - Lifelong learning and cross-sector cooperation are the key factors for success!**

The Lifelong Learning Platform welcomes the European Commission's [Communication](#) "Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies" and other proposals launched on 22 May as the [second package of measures](#) for creating a European Education Area. It is glad to see the commitment to ensure this Area covers learners of all age groups and sectors, including VET and adult learning, and to support Member States in improving the "lifelong-learning based nature" of their education and training systems. It is indeed high time that the European Union and its Member States place learning at all stages - 'from cradle to grave' - high on the political agenda. Nevertheless, it is vital to recall that lifelong learning as a holistic concept of education not only encompasses many different sectors but different types of learning - formal, non-formal and informal - often referred to as 'lifewide' learning. LLLP has consistently called for this holistic approach in its reactions to the first package of measures released in January<sup>1</sup> and to the 2017 Communications on schools and higher education<sup>2</sup>.

Our key message is that recognising this diversity of learning practices and spaces, and ensuring the right conditions for effective partnerships within and between them, should be at the heart of building the European Education Area. After all, learning happens both within and beyond the four walls of the classroom, both during and long beyond compulsory education, and is demanded on a permanent basis by the pace of technological and societal change around us.

*"We need to look at how to connect different learning environments, objectives and outcomes as they have more in common than we may initially think, for example, parents encouraged to learn again when their children start school, or pupils and students who develop new skills through volunteering or sports - the European Education Area should take this nuanced reality of learning into account,"* argues LLLP Secretary-General Ms Regina Ebner. LLLP thus calls for education and training - but also culture, employment, research and innovation - policies that match and support this vision of lifelong learning, with due attention to where they fit in national and European funding priorities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [LLL Response to Future of Learning Package - Building bridges between all forms and sectors of education is the future of learning in Europe](#)

<sup>2</sup> [LLL Policy Statement - Adapting European education systems to meet society's challenges in an ever changing world](#)

<sup>3</sup> [LLL Reaction to the MFF - an EU budget that empowers its citizens through learning and cooperation](#)

**Key messages of the Lifelong Learning Platform:**

- **Policy coherence** - ensure that the key messages and concepts are consistently applied across all policy initiatives, e.g. STEM vs STEAM
- **Social inclusion** - provide adequate support and outreach to learners from vulnerable groups and groups with fewer opportunities and resources
- **Shift from education to learning** - keep a learner-centred perspective at the forefront of the policymaking process and invest in learning research, i.e. how people learn, to ensure evidence-based policy interventions
- **All age groups** - provide quality learning opportunities to people of all ages, adults as well as children and young people
- **Professional development of educators & teachers** - ensure high-quality provisions for initial training and professional development of teachers and educators, including support for collaborations with non-formal and informal education providers
- **Stakeholder involvement** - active outreach to and involvement of stakeholders including teachers, educators, researchers, learners, parents, civil society organisations, social partners and regional and local authorities with a view to building learning communities<sup>4</sup>
- **Synergies with existing tools and measures** - make full use of frameworks, tools and procedures that are already in place in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, e.g. European Qualifications Framework, Europass, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment, as well as feasible EU-funded project results



**1. Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Automatic Mutual Recognition**



The proposal for a Council recommendation on [\*promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad\*](#) is a timely initiative that has much potential to support the cross-border mobility of learners. The

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the UNESCO [\*“Learning Cities”\*](#) initiative

Recommendation's attention to learning periods abroad is a positive development and we support previous calls for these periods to be based on competence-based learning agreements<sup>5</sup>.

*LLLPLATORM recommends to :*

- Broaden the scope of the proposal to encompass **mutual recognition provisions that work for all sectors of education** and take into consideration the increasingly **relevant role of non-formal and informal learning**, often recognised via alternative forms of certification.
- Closely align the proposed Recommendation with the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning - with reinforced implementation efforts - in order to ensure the **cross-border transferability of all learning outcomes**, no matter in which environment they are acquired.
- Arrange more peer-learning activities and counselling between countries as a systematic practice in the area of secondary school education given the vast disparity between the Member States' systems, but with a **learner-driven focus** - hence the need for the participation of all stakeholders and **representatives of the learners themselves**.
- Build on the **existing good practices** of automatic and mutual recognition applied in Member States
- Ensure the learning agreement not only takes into consideration the competences acquired through formal education but equally the **transversal competences gained through non-formal and informal learning** via participation in extracurricular activities, etc.

## 2. Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care systems

LLLPLATORM welcomes the proposed Council recommendation on [High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care systems](#) and the comprehensive '[Quality framework for early childhood education and care](#)' presented in its Annex. This brings long-overdue attention to the early years of the lifelong learning continuum.<sup>6</sup>



*LLLPLATORM recommends to:*

- Promote even more strongly the further integration of services for families and children, as **a holistic, multisectoral approach is crucial in order to enhance the development of the child**.
- Closely align the proposed Recommendation with the Council Conclusions on [Integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion](#) adopted by the EPSCO Council on 21 June which sets a more ambitious precedent, encouraging Member States to *"Apply integrated and child-centred approaches targeting all aspects of child development and well-being and further strengthen the coordination and interaction between health, education, social and child protection systems, as well as integrated and coordinated service delivery at local level"* (art. 25).

<sup>5</sup> [EFIL, EEE-YFU and OBESSU reaction to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Diplomas and learning periods abroad](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Learning for Well-Being Foundation Discussion Paper "Towards systems competent for nurturing children's holistic development from birth through school: Coherence and continuity"](#)

- **Foster deeper collaboration and more structured dialogue between different child-related services** in order to help build this more integrated system, including support for the creation of multidisciplinary teams with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.
- Support the creation of **Community lifelong learning centres**<sup>7</sup> across Europe as a potential solution since such spaces bring a diverse range of target groups (e.g. children, families, young people) and different services (social, psychological, etc.) together, ensuring an integrated provision of services to children, families and the wider community, while at the same time providing a space for volunteer activities which foster informal learning and active citizenship from an early age. These centres are likewise key spaces for promoting **family learning**, an important element that is absent from the proposed Council recommendation<sup>8</sup>.
- **Pay more attention to the role of parents as both educators and learners themselves.** As all scientific evidence shows, parental involvement is essential for the positive and healthy development of children. Cooperation between parents and settings should be fostered and ways of exchange and mutual learning should be supported.
- **Recognise and validate other ways of organising ECEC** (such as childminders, self-organised parents' groups) and foster the continuous personal development of all ECEC staff.
- **Promote availability, accessibility and affordability of high quality childcare facilities** as it is crucial for enabling women, and men, with caring responsibilities to participate in the labour market as well as in further learning and active citizenship.

### 3. Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Teaching and Learning of Languages

We welcome the the proposed Council recommendation on [a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages](#) which brings forth the issue of language learning with a view to (a) expanding learners' world view and limiting barriers between people which cause distrust and fear, and (b) facilitating mobility to train, learn, work and volunteer across Europe, thus making language learning crucial in establishing the European Education Area.



*LLLPL recommends to:*

- Address the growing gap between the public and private provision of quality language learning opportunities. Language learning provision in formal education often lacks investment and resources and requires more support in moving towards a different paradigm of language teaching and learning for the development of learners' **plurilingual and pluricultural competences**.
- Currently, learners with more resources turn to private language lessons which is not a feasible option for those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds - reinforcing the **opportunity gap between different social groups**. Private language lessons are offered through institutes that operate as businesses reproducing monolingual classroom practices with the ideal native speaker in mind leading their clients to dominant language proficiency certification.
- Boost the quality of lifelong learning with **professional development programmes for language educators**, including regular CPD opportunities abroad, and support opportunities for initial teacher

<sup>7</sup> The Lifelong Learning Platform will release a paper on the Community Lifelong Learning Centre concept in autumn 2018

<sup>8</sup> [European Education Area must not leave adults behind - EAEA Reaction to the Second Package of the European Education Area](#)

training programmes to be developed taking into account that learners should be able to function well in social settings defined by linguistic and cultural diversity.

- Recognise language teaching as an **important element for intercultural learning** and peace building in a time when inner European migration as well as migration from outside Europe has become normal, thus provoking the need for language learning.
- Recognise that an ‘innovative approach’ to language teaching and learning should not only mean the use of digital technology, even if there are school conditions for its effective use, but also applies to the types of practices employed in the classroom, aiming at developing learners’ plurilingual competence and intercultural awareness, at **bridging the gap between language learning outside and inside school**, and at emphasizing **experiential ways** of learning.
- Continue supporting the proposal that additional languages are part of the **primary** school curriculum, that they are important in the **secondary** school curriculum and recommend that they become requirements for study at university and other **institutions of higher learning**, where bilingual undergraduate or postgraduate degrees should be a plus.
- Provide more dedicated support to **VET and adult education programmes**, so that these institutions can offer learners more language teaching opportunities appropriate to their needs and occupational requirements.
- Acknowledge the contribution of non-formal and informal learning and mobility, such as activities arranged by community-based groups or intercultural exchange organisations. The proposed Recommendation should explicitly address this, adhering to the clear message of the Communication on [School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life](#) about the importance of a **“whole-school approach” enabling more cooperation between schools and civil society actors**.
- Make more ardent attempts to put forth **recommendations** which are not only survey but **research-based**, and which take into account educational realities in the Member States.

#### 4. European Education Area initiatives

##### *(a) European Universities*

LLLP is glad to see the commitment for ‘European Universities’ to seek a geographical balance and socially inclusive character, as well as support for the co-creation of knowledge between students, lecturers and researchers.



*LLLP recommends to:*

- Ensure the involvement of learners themselves in how these networks are shaped as this is key to creating an **added educational value**.
- Base the initiative not only on promoting excellence in research but increasing the quantity and quality of student mobilities and ensuring **deeper cooperation between the staff of the participating institutions**.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [EUF Position paper on the European University initiative](#)

- Use the initiative to support higher education institutions in building bridges beyond the student population to the wider community and other types of learners, thus **democratising access to and developing knowledge and innovation in a lifelong learning perspective**.
- Clearly link the initiative to the other proposals on mutual recognition of diplomas and study periods abroad, language learning and the European Student Card - essential for a **coherent and integrated approach** to establishing the European Education Area.
- Support the European Universities with the **adequate resources, reforms and flexibility to address the administrative hurdles** they may face in achieving such an ambitious level of cooperation.

### ***(b) European Student Card***

The need for a coherent and integrated approach likewise calls for reflection on how we can expand the scope of the various initiatives, including the European Student Card, to benefit as many learners as possible.

*LLLPLATORM recommends to:*

- Take a broad perspective on the concept of the European Student Card - it should not necessarily take the form of a physical card but be based on a **general approach to the management and portability of learner data** building on existing practices.<sup>10</sup>
- Roll-out the initiative to **all learners** - not only higher education students - with the aim to establish a **European Lifelong Learning Card** recording all of an individual's learning outcomes, enabling their automatic recognition and facilitating admission decisions across borders. Without this possibility for all learners, the Commission's aim to realise the "free movement of learners" is unlikely to become a reality.
- Use this initiative as a **support tool** for the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework and Council recommendation on mutual recognition.

### ***(c) Centres of Vocational Excellence***

In principle we welcome the announced initiative on establishing **Centres of vocational excellence** given their potential to act as hubs of innovation and cross-sector cooperation and the attention they bring to the sector overall.

*LLLPLATORM recommends to:*

- **Put the training provider - and the provision of high-quality training to learners - at the heart of the process** of building these transnational platforms.
- Embed the centres into **more ambitious investment and policies for VET** in general which seek to promote the parity of esteem with academic pathways - otherwise, they will not have a substantial impact.
- In keeping with a learner-centred approach, **expand the envisaged group of stakeholders involved in such initiatives beyond business-related services** to include services such as career guidance centres in order to support learners with all the tools they need to manage and further their own training and professional development.

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<sup>10</sup>See [Erasmus Without Papers](#) and [Groningen Declaration Network](#)

- Adopt a flexible approach to the design and implementation of the Centres, acknowledging that the **idea of excellence very much depends on the national, regional and local context**.
- Pursue excellence in VET while at the same time **maintaining a strong focus on social inclusion** - both goals are complementary and key to realising the EU ambition of making VET a first choice.

## Conclusions



Successfully implementing the various proposals under the European Education Area is a considerable challenge, but in order to assist these efforts we encourage the EU institutions and Member States to **look closely at the synergies among them and with other EU policies and programmes**. This could be a solution to breaking down the existing silos in which these initiatives are handled.

The **recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning**, and all prior learning, is an issue that touches upon many of the initiatives, as many of the skills and competences they address may already be in a learners' skill-set, just not formally recognised or rendered visible. This is especially the case for learners from vulnerable groups or with a migrant background. Establishing and investing in effective validation arrangements, as requested by the 2012 Council recommendation, and making a concrete link with the above proposals should therefore be a priority.

How the European Education Area interlinks with the **European Higher Education Area and European Research Area** also requires careful analysis in order to identify and build on fruitful points of cooperation.

In addition, we cannot forget the first package of measures for establishing a European Education Area, as the **key competences and common values they expect of all learners, as well as the emphasis they place on social inclusion, should have a strong basis in this new package**, with a focus on exploring how non-formal and informal learning can support the formal education sector in meeting such demanding expectations.

To conclude, LLLP and its members remain ready to support the EU institutions and Member States in the implementation of the package in light of their **long experience and expertise in consulting and working with learners and educational institutions in all their diversity**.

Recognising and supporting this diversity of lifelong learning - recalling the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights as the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong **for everyone** - will be key to making the European Education Area a reality that enhances the skills and well-being of all Europe's citizens. It goes without saying that this must go hand-in-hand with a shift in the European Commission and Member States' economic policy priorities towards increased public spending on education and training, as well-resourced public education systems are vital for equality and social inclusion.

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*The Lifelong Learning Platform (European Civil Society for Education) is an umbrella that gathers 43 European organisations active in the field of education, training and youth. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several million beneficiaries.*

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With contribution from:

