

11 - EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS, TOWARDS AN OPEN AREA OF LIFELONG LEARNING

The UK government and the administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland actively participate in the full range of European programmes and initiatives and relating to education, training and lifelong learning. DfES, in consultation with the devolved administrations, has the key responsibility to ensure the UK's full investment in the Lisbon programmes.

1101 - NATIONAL STRATEGIES RELATED TO POLICY PRIORITIES, PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES AT EU LEVEL

For lifelong learning, a strong degree of coherence exists between the priorities identified in the UK and the priorities being followed up through the open method of coordination, the Copenhagen declaration and the Maastricht communiqué (11).

Building on the strengths of the UK's systems and identifying the key challenges that must be tackled, education and training reforms are now identified under a range of lifelong learning strategies. England (12), Scotland (13), Wales (14) and Northern Ireland are each responsible for their own strategy. While the lifelong strategies show differences, for example in the emphasis attached to the social dimensions of policy, a strong degree of interdependence continues for a range of geographical, cultural, linguistic, economic, historical and political reasons. Although all administrations strive for a knowledge economy and a knowledge society, some policy differences can be seen, for example in the upper secondary phase and in the approach to credit and qualifications frameworks.

Key challenges for VET across the UK are highly consistent with the Lisbon aims (15).

Successive UK reform programmes aim to develop an effective skills agenda so as to:

- Achieve cross-government action to tackle skills gaps and shortages;
- Act on the demand side to encourage employers to use skills to develop more ambitious and innovative business strategies;
- Motivate learners to continue in and return to learning, and tackle low skills;
- Make VET responsive to employers' needs;
- Raise the status and quality of initial VET to achieve: a coherent 14-19 phase of learning; a broader range of courses and programmes; high quality vocational options; higher levels of participation and lower levels of early school drop-out; higher levels of qualification, etc.

Taking the UK as a whole, the longer-term strategy is to develop qualifications and learning programmes that engage a wide range of learners, based on the principles of equality and diversity and supported by transparent systems of credit and qualifications frameworks. Scotland has already implemented such a framework, the Scottish credit and qualifications framework; England, Wales and Northern Ireland are in the process of developing a credit-based Qualifications and Credit Framework (see 0201).

Each of the established frameworks within the UK are based on learning outcomes. England and Northern Ireland and Wales are in the process of making provision for credit accumulation and transfer and the accreditation of informal and non-formal learning. Scotland has already done so.

The frameworks of the UK will be referenced to the eight levels of the EQF. UK representatives have been actively involved in discussions about the development of the EQF.

Implementation of ECVET faces some potential barriers, such as multiple independent awarding bodies and is yet to be tested nationally. The implementation of common

practical strategies for improving the transparency of qualifications and other information packages, are not yet widely used but are welcome in the UK.

[1] See UK response to the DGVT questionnaire conducted as part of the Maastricht study.

[2] See: DfES. White Paper: 14-19 Education and Skills. February, 2005; and Department for Education and Skills - DfES. Skills strategy white papers 2001 and 2005. London: DfES, 2005. Available from Internet: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy> [cited 13.5.2005].

[3] Scottish Executive. Learning through Life: Life through Learning. The lifelong learning strategy for Scotland. February 2003. Available from Internet: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/lifelong/lism-00.asp>.

[4] National Assembly for Wales. The learning country: a paving document: a comprehensive education and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales, 2001.

[5] The following is adapted from the UK's response to the DGVT questionnaire for the Maastricht study.

1102 - IMPACT OF EUROPEANISATION/INTERNATIONALISATION ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In terms of some key identified priorities of the current European programmes, the 'scorecard' for the UK can be summarised ([3] see file footnote) as follows:

- The UK performs, on average, comparatively well in international surveys of the basic skills of 15 year olds;
- Large numbers of adults are identified as lacking basic skills; innovative policies are in place for achieving socially inclusive outcomes, but this remains a major challenge;
- The UK has a comparatively high level of early school leavers, and lower levels of qualification at upper secondary level. While progress has been made, much will depend on the effectiveness of reform programmes;
- The UK compares well with the performance of most EU Member States in terms of participation in maths, science and technology graduates in higher education;
- The UK scores highly on all of the available indicators of participation in lifelong learning and CVT, already reaching the EU target;
- Government spending on education and training was in line with the EU average in 1999, fell subsequently, and is now rising to a position well above the EU average;
- Employment levels are well above the European average and largely in line with the Lisbon objectives. Low skills and an ageing workforce create continuing pressures for reform;
- Aspects of the Copenhagen process, particularly the development of qualifications frameworks and frameworks for credit, are high on the UK reform agenda.

It remains true that the Lisbon and Copenhagen frameworks are increasingly, but not yet widely, known in the UK policy and research communities for VET. The House of Lords EU committee in its report on the Proposed Integrated Action Programme for Lifelong Learning (2005) highlighted a lack of a coherent national strategy for making most of the EU programmes and tackling the decline in British participation. Since then, DIUS published a White Paper "Innovation Nation" (2008), where there is an explicit reference to the importance of the EU dimension, in terms of R&D, as well as further encouragement of UK business participation in EU programmes.

The government is expected to draw together inter-related policies in higher and further education, skills, research and innovation during 2008. The FE colleges' international co-operation strategy (2006) mostly builds on the UK traditional links beyond Europe and will remain a vital part of international networks and mutual learning communities.

In terms of mobility of learners, the UK is no longer the most popular destination for foreign Erasmus learners, and UK students participate less in EU cross-national learning and work experience placements than do learners in many other countries. In line with the latest EU initiative to target those 'hard to reach', the UK promotes new EU integrated programmes among older and part-time students, although there are challenges in terms of work and family commitments and underdeveloped language skills.

Traditionally, UK has had a comparatively well-developed ICT supported learning system across all levels. The government finances a national network of 6,000 local online centres where general public can have access to internet, and support in using it. A national network of learndirect based in community locations provide access to online adult education programmes and associated support./

The UK's and the European priorities and objectives for VET are very similar. The UK's policy and research communities are active throughout the EU's policy development and peer learning processes, and synergy certainly exists.

[1]Work Foundation is a not-for-dividend public interest company, which provides consultancy and undertakes research in companies' performance through improving the quality of working life.

[2]The following is adapted from Hutton, W. Where are the gaps? - An analysis of UK skills and education strategy in the light of the Kok Group and European Commission Midterm Review of the Lisbon goals. London: Work Foundation, 2005, p. 4.

[3]Based on Hutton, W. Where are the gaps? an analysis of UK skills and education strategy in the light of the Kok Group and European Commission Midterm Review of the Lisbon goals. London: Work Foundation, 2005, p. 4.; and Achieving the Lisbon goal: the contribution of VET: final report to the EC: the Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to Maastricht Consortium, November 2004.

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110302 - SOURCES, REFERENCES AND WEBSITES

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INTERNET RESOURCES

Ageing:

www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=949

Careers Scotland:

<http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk/home/home.asp>

Connexions:

<http://www.connexions.gov.uk/>

Jobcentre:

[Jobcentre Plus](#)

Labour force survey:

www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Source.asp?vlnk=358.

learnirect:

<http://www.learnirect.co.uk/>

New Deal for Young People (NDYP):

http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/

Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework:

<http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

Young Enterprise:

<http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/>

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