# 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'.

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,

[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).

[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.

— 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.

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([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.

([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.