

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Adoption of a multi-annual programme (2004-2006) for the effective integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme)'**

(2003/C 244/09)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the proposal for the Adoption of a multi-annual programme (2004-2006) for the effective integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme) (COM(2002) 751 — 2002/0303 (COD));

having regard to the decision of the Council of 22 January 2003 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the decision of its President of 26 June 2002 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on the subject;

having regard to the decision of its President of 28 February 2003 to appoint Mr Risto Ervelä, Chairman of Sauvo Local Council and Chairman of the Regional Council of Southwest Finland (FIN-ELDR), as rapporteur-general, under Rule 40(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 49th plenary session of 9 and 10 April 2003 (meeting of 10 April).

**1. The Committee of the Regions' views**

that this contributes to and could further exacerbate disparities in the achievement of the programme's objectives;

The Committee of the Regions

1.1. takes the view that the creative and innovative use of ICT will improve the quality of European education and training systems and considers the Commission's proposal for a multi-annual eLearning Programme to be a key element in this development;

1.5. believes that the possibility of new Member States to participate in the programme before accession supports the overall objectives of enlargement;

1.2. highlights the important role of local and regional authorities in education and training and feels that their close involvement in the implementation of the programme is a prerequisite for achieving the objectives;

1.6. points out that the cooperation of grass-roots players (such as local and regional authorities, NGOs, companies) has a major role to play in achieving the programme's objectives;

1.3. emphasises that all students and educational institutions must be able to exploit the potential of the information society and further stresses that the achievement of this objective is particularly difficult in regions which face special challenges because of location or the structure of the community such as in remote areas and the outermost regions, or owing to insufficient infrastructure, poor purchase and maintenance budgets, unequal opportunities for accessing information, etc.;

1.7. stresses that equipping people with the skills needed for the workplace is one of the main goals of education and training and considers that this requires close cooperation between the education and training sector and companies as skill requirements change rapidly in a knowledge-based information society;

1.4. notes that there are major regional and local disparities in the provision of telecommunications services in Europe and

1.8. notes that, in creating a new learning environment, special attention needs to be paid to content production and the quality of learning, while bearing in mind the human dimension of education objectives and the importance of interaction between people;

1.9. emphasises that the use of ICT in education and training and, on the other hand, the teaching of ICT skills are different things and feels that the Commission proposal lacks conceptual clarity in this regard;

1.10. considers it essential that the programme, in line with the Commission proposal, transcends the boundaries of education and training and stresses that this requires a new kind of partnership, which, in addition to local and regional authorities, includes different levels of education, adult education and employers;

1.11. feels that the Commission's proposed lines of action (fighting the digital divide, European virtual campuses and school twinning via the Internet) meet the priorities previously identified by the Committee;

1.12. notes that the resources earmarked for implementing the programme are inadequate in relation to the objectives;

1.13. considers it important that clear objectives have been set for the programme and that the objectives will be monitored and evaluated but points out that evaluation must not become unnecessarily burdensome in economic and administrative terms;

1.14. notes that promoting the use of ICT in education and training is not enough to guarantee the high quality of education and training and that it is only one way of improving learning;

1.15. endorses the programme's aim to offer virtual mobility as an alternative for all people who, for one reason or another, are unable to benefit from physical mobility and feels that, in this respect, the programme is an excellent complement to the EU's other education, training and youth programmes.

## 2. The Committee of the Regions' specific comments

### The Committee of the Regions

2.1. feels that the key role played by local and regional authorities in combating exclusion in the information society should be recognised in the implementation of the programme and hopes that this work receives support from different levels of decision-making;

2.2. points out that teaching materials are often culturally rooted and therefore the programme must support content production in minority languages, as it is often not profitable to produce such material in digital form;

2.3. believes it is important as a prerequisite for preventing exclusion that attention is paid in the implementation of the programme to the need to develop user-friendly equipment and software for all user groups;

2.4. hopes that the programme will make a major contribution to fostering the use of open source software in education and training;

2.5. takes the view that the eLearning Programme and the document setting out the future objectives of European education and training systems, as well as its related monitoring process, should clearly support each other;

2.6. hopes that, in addition to supporting the Bologna process in the area of higher education, the programme will also take on board the Copenhagen process in the context of vocational training;

2.7. proposes a flexible approach in the implementation of the programme so that development work in Member States can be supported and encouraged regardless of the stage it has reached or the way in which it is advancing;

2.8. feels that, in order to achieve the objectives set for it, the scope of the programme should be broadened as soon as possible to include primary education;

2.9. emphasises that the lifelong learning objectives require that elearning opportunities are also accessible outside educational establishments wherever people are;

2.10. assumes that the social, individual and ethical development of children and young people will also be provided for in the Internet age and that effective action will be taken to combat harmful content;

2.11. takes the view that the eLearning Programme must safeguard Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity;

2.12. stresses that cooperation and coordination with other EU education and training programmes are essential so as to avoid duplication and ensure that the programmes complement each other effectively;

2.13. considers it important that ICT be used to develop quality distance learning methods that can be used to increase and broaden the provision of education and training also in regions and municipalities where it would otherwise be unduly expensive or difficult such as in remote areas and the outermost regions;

2.14. hopes that it will be possible to extend the eLearning Programme to include cross-border school twinning in regions which are and will continue to be located outside the EU;

2.15. believes it is important from the point of view of developing content production and e-learning that it is recognised that teachers and trainers have a role to play not only in the use of e-learning resources but also in their development and further feels that special attention needs to be paid to the IT training of teachers and student teachers and to the pedagogical use of digital teaching materials in education;

2.16. takes the view that digital teaching materials should contain adequate pedagogical instructions for teachers so as to facilitate their use;

2.17. considers it is appropriate to allocate the programme's resources to the most effective and strategically important actions, with special emphasis on the most innovative pedagogical approaches;

2.18. notes that evaluations should focus on the added value which ICT brings to learning and hopes that the results of the interim evaluations of the programme can be utilised in developing the structure and contents of EU education, training and youth programmes (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci and Socrates) after 2006;

2.19. emphasises that, in addition to ICT and virtual mobility, electronic school twinning needs to be backed up by actual teacher and student exchange schemes.

### 3. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

#### Article 2

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>2. The specific objectives of the programme are:</p> <p>(e) to provide mechanisms for encouraging improvement of quality of products and services as well as for their effective dissemination and for exchange of good practice.</p>	<p>2. The specific objectives of the programme are:</p> <p>(e) to provide mechanisms for encouraging improvement of quality of products, <u>and services and pedagogical solutions supporting e-learning</u> as well as for their effective dissemination and for exchange of good practice.</p>

#### Reasons

More innovation is needed in the use of e-learning. e-Learning can only be successful if adequate consideration is given to the needs of the learner and the nature of what is to be learnt. It is important to emphasise the quality of elearning products and services and to take account of pedagogical aspects in their use.

## Recommendation 2

## Article 3

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>1. The objectives of the programme shall be pursued in the following areas of intervention, in accordance with the action lines described in the Annex:</p> <p>(b) European virtual campuses: Actions in this area will address a better integration of the virtual dimension in Higher Education. The objective is to encourage the development of new organisational models for European virtual universities (virtual campus) and for European exchange and sharing schemes (virtual mobility), building on existing European co-operation frameworks (Erasmus programme, Bologna process), and providing an 'e-learning dimension' to their operational tools (ECTS, European Masters; quality assurance; mobility);</p>	<p>1. The objectives of the programme shall be pursued in the following areas of intervention, in accordance with the action lines described in the Annex:</p> <p>(b) European virtual campuses: Actions in this area will address a better integration of the virtual dimension in Higher Education. The objective is to encourage the development of new organisational models for European virtual universities and other <u>higher education institutions</u> (virtual campus) and for European exchange and sharing schemes (virtual mobility), building on existing European co-operation frameworks (Erasmus programme, Bologna process), and providing an 'e-learning dimension' to their operational tools (ECTS, European Masters; quality assurance; mobility);</p>

## Reasons

The concept 'university' does not cover the whole of higher education. In many European countries higher education embraces both universities and polytechnics.

## Recommendation 3

## Article 3

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
<p>2. These actions shall be realised in accordance with the procedures set out in the Annex, and through the following approaches, which may be combined where appropriate:</p> <p>(c) support for strategic actions by European networks and partnerships designed to foster innovation, quality in the design and use of products and services, based on the relevant use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for education and training;</p>	<p>2. These actions shall be realised in accordance with the procedures set out in the Annex, and through the following approaches, which may be combined where appropriate:</p> <p>(c) support for strategic actions by European networks and partnerships designed to foster innovation, quality in the design and use of products, <u>and services and pedagogical solutions supporting e-learning</u>, based on the relevant use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for education and training;</p>

## Reasons

More innovation is needed in the use of e-learning. eLearning can only be successful if adequate consideration is given to the needs of the learner and the nature of what is to be learnt. It is important to emphasise the quality of elearning products and services and to take account of pedagogical aspects in their use.

## Recommendation 4

## Article 10

Text proposed by the Commission	CoR amendment
1. Budgetary distribution between the actions shall be as follows:	1. Budgetary distribution between the actions shall be as follows:
(a) e-learning for fighting the digital divide: around 25 % of total budget;	(a) e-learning for fighting the digital divide: around <del>25</del> 30 % of total budget;
(b) European virtual campuses: around 30 % of total budget.	(b) European virtual campuses: around <del>30</del> 25 % of total budget.

*Reasons*

Fighting the digital divide is a particularly important objective given Europe's changing age structure, the challenges of lifelong learning and changes in the workplace and economic activity.

Brussels, 10 April 2003.

*The President  
of the Committee of the Regions*  
Albert BORE

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on:**

- the 'Review of the European Employment Strategy and the Employment Guidelines for 2003 based on the Communication on Taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy', and
- the 'Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "The future of the European Employment Strategy (EES): A strategy for full employment and better jobs for all"'

(2003/C 244/10)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Taking stock of five years of the European Employment strategy (COM(2002) 416 final) and the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on The future of the European Employment Strategy (EES): A strategy for full employment and better jobs for all (COM(2003) 6 final);

having regard to the Decisions of the European Commission of 18 July 2002 and 14 January 2003 to consult it, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the Decision of its President of 23 September 2002 to instruct the Commission for Economic and Social Policy to draw up an opinion on this subject;