(2001/C 163 E/261)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3891/00
by Marjo Matikainen-Kallström (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(13 December 2000)

Subject: Gaps in the Commission's websites

There are gaps in the Commission's websites. For example, on the pages dealing with the Directorate-General for External Relations no information is available about the northern dimension to the Union. The Internet is now one of the most important sources of information for the public about Union-related matters. The Commission's failure to provide up-to-date and comprehensive information about the way the Union operates thus runs counter to the spirit of the e-Europe initiative.

Why has the Directorate-General for External Relations ignored the northern dimension on its webpages which present current EU programmes? What steps does the Commission plan to take in order to ensure that the webpages in question are updated in future, not least as regards the northern dimension?

Answer given by Mr Patten on behalf of the Commission
(26 January 2001)

The Commission would like to thank the Honourable Member for her question, which simply anticipates the steps taken by the departments to fill existing gaps in the pages dealing with the Directorate-General for External Affairs. Since the pages are constantly being updated, the Honourable Member is no doubt aware that a speech on the northern dimension was recently included and further information will be added in the coming weeks.

(2001/C 163 E/262)

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3908/00
by Guido Podestà (PPE-DE) to the Commission
(4 December 2000)

Subject: Non-completion of schooling in Europe

The failure of European school children to complete their education is a complex issue and one which arouses strong feelings since it involves the generation which finds it hardest to enter the employment market.

Uniform, comparable statistics have never been available, the main reason for this being the diversity of Europe's education systems, compounded by the difficulty of finding a common definition of the problem.

Could the Commission supply data which would provide an accurate picture of the situation regarding the premature abandonment of schooling in the individual Member States, and would it once again propose (as it did back in 1992) that a European Monitoring Centre on the non-completion of education be set up?

What action does the Commission intend to take in order to contain this problem, which marginalises and wastes the potential of the young people who represent Europe's future?

Does the Commission not think that it should present a special programme designed to encourage the completion of schooling in order to prevent young people from being excluded from the world of education and work, and thereby giving more substance to the various Community lifelong training programmes, the main purpose of which is to allow access to the information society?
The Commission recognises that the inclusion of young people into society in general and the labour market in particular remains a significant challenge for the Union, even more so now that the forces of innovation and growth of the European economy are ever more based on the knowledge and skills of its citizens. There is a significant number of young people who fail in school and consequently do not acquire a requisite ‘base-line’ of skills and competencies to be fully integrated in the European knowledge-based economy.

Statistics on the rate of school failure in the Community are lacking because so far no suitable statistical instruments have been developed yet at international level on this subject.

This being said, the Commission, has initiated the best available proxy for measuring drop-out rates in an internationally comparable way using the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS). It is defined as the percentage of the total population of 18-24 years olds having achieved ISCED level 2 (lower secondary education) or less and not attending education or training.

According to this definition, school failure is 20.5% in the Community (1999). This definition is currently used in the framework of the development of structural indicators (follow-up of the Lisbon European Council): ‘early school leavers’ is one of the 32 structural indicators in this context. The indicator is also used for monitoring the employment guideline concerning dropouts (1).

The Commission recognises that there is a need to further expand and improve the development of comparable statistics, which not only register drop-out but also track and analyse learning difficulties and act as early-warning mechanisms before school failure actually occurs.

In the recently published European Report on Quality of School Education (May 2000), sent direct to the Honourable Member and to Parliament’s Secretariat, the Commission, in co-operation with experts designated by the ministers of Education from 28 European countries, proposed 16 indicators for the quality of education, including the rates of school drop-out, where the mentioned statistics were applied (referring to an earlier reference year 1997).

The Second Chance Schools pilot projects, launched on the basis of the 1995 white paper Teaching and learning: towards the learning society (2) demonstrate the Commission’s concern for this group of young people. Second Chance Schools are also included as one of the Action points of the Action Framework for a Sustainable Urban Development (3). The new objective three of the Structural Funds and the new Grundtvig strand of the Socrates II programme now offer ample financial opportunities to support positive actions in this field. Moreover, within the new URBAN II Community Initiative the eligibility of areas is now also related to low levels of educational achievement. The new EQUAL Community Initiative is set to look at improving the chances of success of various target groups with weak positions on the labour market, including those lacking basic qualifications.

Whilst the setting up of a European Monitoring Centre is not planned, the Commission is confident that these various measures are indications that there is, at a European level, growing concern with the plight of school drop-outs and early school leavers and that there continue to be encouraging developments in this field – both for the improvement of statistics available through the European Statistical System and for the enhancement of Community actions to aid this group of young people.

(1) The 1999 employment guidelines – Council resolution of 22 February 1999. In the 1999 employment guidelines, guideline 7 indicates ‘improve the quality of their school systems in order to reduce substantially the number of young people who drop-out of the school system early. Particular attention should also be given to young people with learning difficulties’.

(2) COM(95) 590 final.

(3) COM(98) 605 final.