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PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

"An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training"

Impact Assessment

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Modifications following the Opinion of the Impact Assessment Board

Following the opinion of the Impact Assessment Board several changes have been made to the impact assessment.

Information on the results achieved under the current OMC and in particular performance in relation to the agreed benchmarks has been added to section 2.3. Annex 2 has been added for a more comprehensive description of the current OMC (the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme) and its role in supporting Member States' reforms."¹

In section 4 the characteristics of the baseline scenario have been described in some more detail.

In section 5 more comprehensive analyses of how the individual options respond to the policy objectives has been added.

In section 7 possible future success indicators of the OMC have been added.

1. PROCEDURAL ISSUES AND CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

1.1. Introduction and mandate

The political context of this initiative is the follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy in the field of education and training. The European Council has on various occasions (most recently December 2007 and March 2008) emphasised that education and training/lifelong learning is a key driver of the Lisbon Strategy. This reflects the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs, notably guidelines 23 and 24 on increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills, guideline 8 on facilitating innovation and the knowledge triangle, and guideline 15 on promoting a more entrepreneurial culture.

Furthermore education and training is identified as a key element throughout the renewed Social Agenda for opportunities, access and solidarity. This stresses the role of education and training in relation to children and youth; investing in people, more and better jobs and new skills; mobility; longer and healthier lives; and combating poverty and social exclusion². This current proposal is therefore closely related to the Union's policies for employment, social inclusion, enterprise, research and innovation.

The initiative follows up the existing policy framework for the open method of coordination supporting the Lisbon process in the field of education and training which is entitled the "Education and Training 2010 work programme"

The political mandate for the proposal for an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training is an Education Council invitation to the Commission

¹ The most precise and explicit explanation of the current state of play in education and training (including in relation to the five benchmarks) can be found in the 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", O J C 86/1 of 5 April 2008

² COM(2008) 412

expressed in key messages which were endorsed by the March 2008 European Council. This was based on a specific request in the 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission.³

1.2. Education and Training 2010 work programme

The Education and Training 2010 work programme (hereafter referred to as the OMC) provides an overall framework for policy cooperation between Member States⁴ and the Commission in education and training (for a more comprehensive description of the work programme please see Annex 2). The 4 main elements of the OMC in education and training are:

1) *A set of common objectives* - the Council defined in 2001 **thirteen objectives**⁵ grouped around **three strategic goals**: a) Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU; b) Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems; c) Opening up education and training systems to the wider world.

2) *Monitoring and reporting on progress* - since 2004 the Council and the Commission adopt every two years a **joint report** on the overall progress in implementing the OMC. Furthermore the report adapts the objectives by defining new priorities for the next 2 years. The Council in 2003 adopted 5 **benchmarks** of average European performance. **These** are supported by a set of 16 core **indicators** which have been developed and constantly improved. This framework provides a basis for the preparation of annual progress reports on benchmarks and indicators⁶ as well as the joint reports.

3) *Peer learning* - peer learning is since 2006 organised mainly through a set of 8 **peer learning clusters**⁷ bringing together countries with a particular interest in a given topic related to either national policy implementation or policy development. Peer learning is furthermore carried out in the area of vocational education and training (VET) as part of the Copenhagen process or in the context of the implementation of the adult learning action plan⁸.

4) *EU reference tools supporting national reforms and agenda-setting communications from the Commission* – are a particular and very important feature of the OMC in education and

³ 2008 Joint progress report OJ C 86/1 of 5.4.2008, p. 9: "The Education and Training 2010 work programme provides practical support for Member States' education and training reforms. Significant progress has been achieved since the programme was launched in 2002. Yet education and training reforms need time to bear fruit. Major challenges persist, new challenges have emerged. This work, including cooperation in the framework of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, needs to be continued and indeed made more effective. Reflections on an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training should therefore start now. Given the crucial role of education and training to the Strategy for Jobs and Growth, this must be closely associated with the future development of the Lisbon process."

⁴ Also EFTA and applicant countries participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme participate in the work programme.

⁵ For the 13 detailed objectives see Annex 1.

⁶ Latest Progress Report - Indicators and benchmarks 2008, SEC (2008) 2293.

⁷ The clusters deal with the following issues: Modernising Higher Education, Best use of Resources, Teachers and Trainers, Access and Social Inclusion, Math, Science and Technology, Key Competences, ICT, Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

⁸ COM (2007) 558

training (e.g. the European Qualifications Framework/EQF⁹, the Key Competences Recommendation,¹⁰ Communications on the modernisation of higher education¹¹, adult education¹² or schools¹³).

The political steering of the OMC takes place through the Council and, since 2005, the implementation and coordination of the OMC is in the hands of the **Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group** (ETCG)¹⁴. In addition, since 2002, a **High Level Group** with representatives of all Member States is convened at least twice a year on the initiative of upcoming presidencies to discuss the political priorities of these presidencies in the field of education and training, including key issues arising concerning the OMC and its future development.

1.3. Consultation of countries, European social partners and stakeholders, and experts

In the preparation of the Communication on an updated framework, the countries participating in the OMC (32), the European social partners (5) and European stakeholder organisations in education and training (52) have been consulted in various meetings and in writing. The different steps and elements in this process have been as follows:

- DG EAC's **Expert Networks on the Economics of Education (EENEE) and on the Social Sciences of Education (NESSE)** produced a joint analytical report on the future challenges for European education and training systems¹⁵.
- The **ETCG** was consulted in a meeting 14 April 2008 on the working methods of the current OMC and particularly on the biennial reporting and peer-learning clusters.
- The **High Level Group** (representing Member States) was consulted in meetings on 24 April and 16-17 June 2008 on the strategic challenges and policy priorities for the updated framework and on the nature of the updated OMC and its working methods. A further meeting of the High level Group took place on 1 October 2008 to discuss future benchmarks.
- A **Stakeholders' Forum** (44 participating organisations) was held on 20 May 2008 for broad consultations of the European Stakeholders representing civil society and of the European social partners.
- In addition to these oral consultations, the participating countries, European social partners and stakeholders were consulted separately **in writing**¹⁶.

⁹ OJ C 111/1 of 6.5.2008

¹⁰ OJ L 394/10 of 30.12.2006

¹¹ COM(2006) 208

¹² COM(2006) 614; COM(2007) 558

¹³ COM(2008) 425

¹⁴ Members of the ETCG are all participating countries (see footnote 4) and the European social partners.

¹⁵ "European Education and Training Systems in the Second Decennium of the Lisbon Strategy" Idesbald Nicaise (ed.) Joint Analytical Report for the European Commission prepared by the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) and the Network of experts in the Social Sciences of Education (NESSE).

- An **Inter-Service Steering Group** met three times and had representatives from the following Directorate-Generals: Secretariat-General, Research, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Information Society and Media, Economic and Financial Affairs, Enterprise and Industry and Eurostat (which was invited and included in the distribution of documents but did not actually participate).

The key results of the consultations with countries (24 written responses), European social partners (5) and European stakeholders (13) are briefly summarised below. Further reference to the results of the consultation on working methods will be made in later sections (especially section 2.3).

Challenges and political priorities

On overall **key challenges**, the countries, European social partners and European stakeholders generally agreed with the conclusions drawn by the EENEE and NESSE networks that the bulk of key challenges facing European societies which have an impact on education and training systems in Europe have not radically changed since the launch of the OMC in 2001/02. Demographic change, global competition and the development of the knowledge society/technological change remain crucial issues. There is however also agreement on the fact that increased attention needs to be given to issues related to migration and sustainability (for more details see section 2).

On **specific challenges** for the next 5-10 years, most consulted parties still find the original three broad goals and the thirteen specific objectives agreed in 2001 to be relevant. Especially quality and access are still given high priority. Social partners and stakeholders prioritised mostly the same issues as Member States, but with a more practical angle often referring to the conditions for education and training providers. The main specific challenges mentioned during the consultation are the following : quality (including quality assurance for VET, in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to early childhood education), social inclusion (including democratic citizenship through access, equality and diversity in lifelong learning; a particular emphasis was also put on migration and intercultural dialogue), creativity/innovation/use of research (including follow-up to the work on evidence based policy making¹⁶), skills deficiencies (addressing skills gaps, development of key competences, reducing the number of early school leavers and raising basic skills levels), professional development for teachers and trainers (including pedagogical resource development).

Working methods

It is clear that countries see a general need for better links between the OMC in education and training and the Lisbon Strategy. At the same time, however, they also stress that education and training is about more than growth and jobs. Addressing issues of citizenship and intercultural dialogue, for example, is also considered essential for education and training.

The majority of countries, social partners and stakeholders acknowledge that the OMC in education and training has effectively supported the development of national education and

¹⁶ A six weeks deadline was given for replying which made it possible to introduce a first set of conclusions from the written consultation to the meeting of the High Level Group 16- 17 June.

¹⁷ SEC (2007)1098 "Towards more knowledge-based policy and practice in education and training"

training policies. Particularly the OMC has provided a knowledge base for national policy making and objective setting, achieved greater convergence between national policies, provided comparable data, established benchmarks and indicators, and brought policy makers together to discuss policies, issues and good practice.

On working groups, clusters and instruments, the feedback shows that the more practical that the focus is the more useful they seem to be to countries and others. Countries do, however, generally find it difficult to quantify the direct impact on national policy of these methods. They recommend certain adjustments of the working methods.

Conclusions of section 1

The result of the broad consultation of countries, social partners and stakeholders on the results of the current OMC was largely favourable. The overall challenges and objectives remain valid. Adjustments to the working methods are recommended in order to increase their focus and effectiveness.

2. PROBLEM DEFINITION

As illustrated in the previous chapter, there is general agreement that the OMC in education and training has effectively supported the development of national education and training policies and systems since 2001. Nevertheless, these policies and systems in Europe do not yet adequately provide citizens with the level and relevance of skills and competences that are needed to sustain a knowledge-based economy and society which is both competitive and socially inclusive. The problem needs to be defined both in terms of the challenges to education and training systems throughout Europe and of how to address these challenges at European level; that is the OMC itself.

2.1. Economic and social challenges

The Lisbon strategy was designed in 2000 to respond to three major challenges for European societies and economies: the **knowledge economy**, **demographic change** and **globalisation**. These challenges persist; their consequences can be increasingly felt. Globalisation has developed further with new forces of global competition (e.g. the so called BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China) becoming more and more relevant. Enlargement has led to a wider and more diverse Europe. Also the impact of demographic changes – the ageing of European societies – will be felt to a greater extent.

In addition to these persisting challenges, there are also some additional issues which have become increasingly salient over the last years, in particular migration and sustainability. **Migration** is actually related to all three items mentioned before. It is as much an opportunity as a challenge for Europe. Migration may, on the one hand, help to compensate for the problem of a shrinking labour force and attract high skilled labour to Europe. On the other hand, there are important challenges in relation to the integration of migrants in the host societies. And there are challenges in relation to competition with other parts of the world in attracting high skilled labour, top researchers etc. and to avoiding brain-drain, both in Europe and in third world countries. **Sustainability** has become an important issue, in particular in relation to climate change and environmental degradation. Moving to a low-carbon, energy-efficient economy will require huge efforts in innovation and the development of new

technologies. This does of course pose certain challenges to education and training systems as far as providing the right competences.

All these developments point to the crucial importance of highly performing education and training systems to maintain and improve competitiveness and employment. The EU will only be able to compete on the global market on the basis of high productivity and a high capacity for creativity and innovation. This implies that an important part of the answer to those challenges lies in raising the skills levels in the population, both young and old, and in ensuring that they have the right skills which are adapted to the needs of today's economy and society and ensures their employability.

In particular, the impact of the shrinking working age population must be diminished by reducing the number of those at a risk of not being able to enter or stay on the labour market, because they are early school leavers, lack basic skills or have difficulties in accessing lifelong learning opportunities, and increasing their employability. The full potential of the young generation must be used while more must be done to up-date the skills of the older generation. This is as much about ensuring competitiveness and employment as providing people the chance to play an active role in society and ensuring social cohesion.

While education and training hence have a crucial impact on promoting growth and jobs, the challenges cited before also indicate why many respondents to the consultation stressed that there are also other dimensions which cannot be neglected. Failing to ensure the provision of high quality education and training outcomes will also have an important impact on **social inclusion** and **citizenship**. Students' experiences in primary and secondary school helps shape the rest of their lives in terms of their attitudes and interests, their prospects of going on to tertiary education and the jobs they are going to have. The competences and learning habits acquired at school are essential to develop new skills for new jobs later in life. People with a low level of skills are not well prepared for learning new skills and competences later in life and are increasingly at risk of being excluded from active participation in today's knowledge economy and society. Ensuring high quality and equitable education and training outcomes is an important factor in order to ensure that young people get the best possible start in life and for citizens in general to have the basis for further personal development, social participation and fulfilling careers.

2.2. Need for higher skills levels and the economic and social benefits of investment in education and training

2.2.1. Attainment levels

In view of the general need to raise the skills levels in the population, some trends on skills development over the last years indicate a slow skills upgrading process. The educational attainment level of the working age population in the EU (15 to 64 year olds) has risen during the last decade. In 2006 there were 7 million more persons in the labour force having a high educational attainment level, compared to 2000. Since 2000, upper secondary attainment in the EU increased slightly, from 76.6% of people aged 18-24 to 77.8% in 2006. In other words, higher education institutions produce about one million more graduates per year

compared to 2000. Furthermore, the number of graduates in maths, science and technology has increased by 26% since 2000.¹⁸

However, the overall picture is still mixed. Important challenges persist. Almost 108 million people (about 1/3 of the labour force aged 15 to 64) still have a low educational attainment level. Adults' training programmes are still inadequate, and do not touch the adults with the highest needs. Adults whose educational attainment level is less than upper secondary completion are, in the EU, three times less likely to participate in education and training than those with high attainment levels. Education systems still produce too many early school leavers. Every sixth young person (18 to 24 years old) still leaves school with only compulsory education attainment level or below (2006 data).

2.2.2. *Future labour market needs*

This mixed picture is completed by an analysis that the current trends in skills upgrading will not be sufficient to meet the labour market needs. According to a Cedefop forecasting study¹⁹, Europe would lose 8.5 millions of jobs for workers with low qualification between 2006 and 2015. At the same time, the economy would create 12.5 million additional jobs at the highest qualification level and 9.5 million at the medium level. Jobs that require high or intermediate skills would correspond to 79% of labour market needs in 2015 (compared to 74% in 2006). Technological change and globalisation may even accelerate the shift in skills demand.

The Cedefop forecast of the skills supply side does not yet allow a precise comparison with the forecast on the demand side. But some policy conclusions can already be drawn. One is that – as newcomers alone will not fill future skills gaps – there will still be a strong need to upgrade the skills of the existing workforce. If current trends were to continue, Europe would face serious risks of mismatches between skills supply and demand, with shortages of high-skilled workers as well as insufficient qualification levels, and hence a high unemployment level, of low qualified people. Bottlenecks in the high segments of the labour market may exert an upward pressure on the wages of these workers. At the same time, there may be a "surplus" of unskilled workers, which would lead to the deterioration of their bargaining power and, as a consequence, also a deterioration of their living and working conditions. Studies in the UK²⁰, France²¹ and Germany²² already suggest a risk of polarisation on the labour market, due to a shift in skills demand.

2.2.3. *Economic impacts*

The economic benefits of education and training are now well documented. Employment opportunities and wages are higher for those who attain upper-secondary or tertiary education: in 2007, the employment rate of people with high educational attainment was 83.8%, compared to 70.3% for those with medium educational attainment and 48.6% for low educational attainment²³. Income from employment is higher for the better educated in all

¹⁸ Progress Report - Indicators and benchmarks 2008, SEC (2008) 2293.

¹⁹ CEDEFOP (2008), *Future Skill Needs in Europe. Medium-term forecast*, Synthesis report.

²⁰ Goos M. and Manning A. (2007), "Lousy and lovely jobs; the rising polarization of work in Britain", *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 89 (1), 118-133

²¹ Centre d'analyse stratégique (2007), *Les métiers en 2015*, report, La documentation française.

²² Dustman C., Ludsteck C., Schönberg U. (2007), "Revisiting the German Wage Structure", IZA Discussion Paper, no. 2685, March

²³ SEC(2008) 2293, p. 143

OECD countries²⁴. Private returns to investment in education are very important and surpass all other forms of investment²⁵.

More specifically, learner mobility has a positive impact on success in employment. A better educated population (including in relation to language skills) is generally more conducive to labour mobility. Studies show in particular that graduates who had studied abroad or had worked abroad during or just after graduation, are more successful on the labour market (shorter periods of unemployment, higher income, international careers).²⁶

More ambitious education and training policies also contribute to raising productivity. Skills supply is a driving factor for innovation, economic growth and employment²⁷. Empirical research shows that one year of additional education would increase the aggregate productivity of 5-6% in the short-term. The result of the impact of higher education on technological progress could amount to another 3-5% in the long-run²⁸. Also by analysing data from 11 European countries, it is estimated that, if all dropouts completed upper-secondary education, total productivity would increase by 1.4%.

These effects can also be identified at the macroeconomic level: in OECD countries, each year of additional schooling is statistically significantly associated with a 0.3 higher rate of economic growth²⁹. Higher PISA test scores are associated with higher rate of economic growth of GDP per capita³⁰.

In addition to the positive effects of investment in education and training, there are also margins for improving education quality without increasing public spending in this sector. The reallocation of resources, training of teachers and use of effective pedagogies and organisational models are cost-effective tools that can improve the quality of education. The Data Envelopment Analysis indicates that the potential for increasing learning outcomes while maintaining existing level of resources is high – over 20% across countries for which data exists³¹.

²⁴ See table A9.1a of OECD (2007), *Education at a glance*, p. 156

²⁵ See table A9.5 and A9.6 in OECD (2007), *Education at a glance*, p. 165.

²⁶ Allen, J. and van der Velden, R. (eds) (2007), "The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society: General Results of the REFLEX Project", Research Centre for the Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University, The Netherlands. These results confirm the Commission's own evaluations of the Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci programmes.

²⁷ Better educated workers for example help their colleagues and contribute to developing more productive work organisation or new products. See also Machin S. (2004), 'Skill Biased Technology Change and Educational Outcomes', in G. Johnes and J. Johnes (eds.) *International Handbook of the Economics of Education*, (2004) and EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2008), Analytical report (title to be confirmed)

²⁸ De la Fuente A., (2003), *Human Capital in a Global and Knowledge-Based Economy, Part II: Assessment at the EU Country Level*, Report for the European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs; Brunello G. and Comi S. (2004), "Education and Earnings Growth: Evidence from 11 European Countries", *Economics of Education Review*, 23 (1), 75-83

²⁹ De la Fuente A., (2003), *Human Capital in a Global and Knowledge-Based Economy, Part II: Assessment at the EU Country Level*, Report for the European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, and EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2007), *The Costs of School Failure. A Feasibility Study*, Analytical Report for the European Commission.

³⁰ Hanusek E. and Woessmann L. (2007), "The role of education quality in economic growth", The World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 4122.

³¹ Progress Report – Indicators and Benchmarks 2008, SEC(2008) 2293, chapter 8

2.2.4. Wider economic and social impacts

Research results are also available regarding the positive impact of education on personal well-being and on society at large. Education affects **health**, for example, by changing behaviour and through higher incomes. A higher level of education increases cognition by avoiding unhealthy behaviour, such as smoking, and in following medical advice³² (EENEE, 2007). A higher income allows the better educated to consume better food and buy better health care. As a consequence, an additional year of schooling significantly improves health status. The percentage of people with a long standing disease is higher among early school leavers than for those who have completed upper secondary education: the difference attains 8 percentage point in countries such as Belgium and Denmark and 17 points in Lithuania³³.

Additional years of schooling also reduce **crime**³⁴. The economic benefits of this positive effect of education in the UK are estimated as follows: if the proportion of the working age population with no qualifications were reduced by 1 percentage point and those people achieved A Level or equivalent qualifications, the saving in reduced crime would be £665 million per year. (The health and crime impacts of education and training will not, however, be addressed directly by the OMC as they are more positive side effects that actual priorities for education and training). Educational attainment has also significant effects on issues related to **citizenship** such as voter participation, tolerance, support of free speech and trust in other people³⁵.

³² EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2007), *The Costs of School Failure. A Feasibility Study*, Analytical Report for the European Commission.

³³ See EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2007), *The Costs of School Failure. A Feasibility Study*, Analytical Report for the European Commission). The effect is still significant after controlling for other factors: Feinstein (2002b), *Quantitative Estimates of the Social Benefits of Learning, 2: Health (Depression and obesity)*, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report, No 6 and Groot W. and van der Brink H. M. (2007), "The Health effects of education", Review of the economics of education, 26(2), p. 186-200. Feinstein (2002b) tried to move beyond raw associations and document the causal effects of education on two health conditions, obesity and depression, in the UK. He can then estimate the value of the benefits of one half of the different groups in the population gaining level 1 qualification (relative to none): the corresponding reduction in the probability of obesity and depression is about £6 billion per year (Feinstein, 2002b). In a recent analysis using a large survey for the Netherlands, Groot and van der Brink (2007) estimate the absolute value of health gain due to one extra year of education: 600-1380 euros for men and 300-600 euros for women. These gains correspond to a significant percentage of GDP per capita (1.3-5.8%). In other words, taking into account the return to health, the rate of return to investment in education, as conventionally calculated in the economics of education, should be increased by up to 60 percent. See EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2007), *The Costs of School Failure. A Feasibility Study*, Analytical Report for the European Commission).

³⁴ See EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2007), *The Costs of School Failure. A Feasibility Study*, Analytical Report for the European Commission) and Feinstein (2002a), *Quantitative Estimates of the Social Benefits of Learning, 1: Crime*, Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report, No 5.

³⁵ EENEE (European Experts Network on the Economics of Education) (2007), *The Costs of School Failure. A Feasibility Study*, Analytical Report for the European Commission; OECD (2006), *Measuring the effects of education on health and civic engagement*, Paris: OECD and Baudelot and Leclercq (eds) (2005), *Les effets de l'éducation*, La documentation française

2.3. The EU's role in education and training: improving the implementation of the OMC

The economic and social challenges described above are common to all European countries. Some issues, such as migration and mobility for the purpose of work or study, have specific cross-border effects which cannot be solved by any one country alone. The awareness of the need for and value of European cooperation in the field of education and training has hence grown steadily over the last 25 years.

Education and training was, from the start, identified as a crucial factor to achieve the overall objectives of the Lisbon Strategy. During the past years, a number (14 in 2006 and 16 in 2007) of country specific recommendations have been issued to Member States relating to their performance in education and training, lifelong learning and skills on the basis of the integrated guidelines 23 & 24 on increasing investment in human capital through better education and skills.

The intergovernmental Bologna process in higher education and the EU Copenhagen process in the area of vocational education and training, launched in 1999 and 2002 respectively, have strengthened the awareness of the value of enhanced co-operation, mobility, transparency and portability of qualifications in a situation where countries have different systems but shared goals. Both processes laid the foundation for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).³⁶ Furthermore, the Bologna process has increased considerably the convergence between national higher education systems and qualifications. The added value of the Copenhagen process has, on the other hand, helped to raise the profile and status of vocational education and training and led to various EU instruments such as the EQF, principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Europass³⁷ and the proposed European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).³⁸

The OECD's PISA surveys carried out since 2000 and assessing the results of students at school level have been an eye-opener for most countries. The results have made it abundantly clear that certain problems in schools are common to many countries. And they have also shown that certain countries do measurably better than others. This has paved the way for an increased interest in cooperating and learning from each other even on issues, such as school education,³⁹ which were for many years considered inappropriate for European co-operation.⁴⁰

The Education and Training 2010 work programme was set up in 2001/02⁴¹ to contribute to achieving the Lisbon objectives and has delivered concrete results. It led to the identification of a common reform agenda, a structured exchange of good practice between countries, regular monitoring of progress on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative reports using agreed statistical indicators and benchmarks, and the development of agreed common European tools supporting national reforms. Europe has registered progress in a number of

³⁶ OJ C 111/1 of 6.5.2008

³⁷ OJ L 340/6 of 31.12.2004

³⁸ COM(2008) 180

³⁹ COM(2008) 425

⁴⁰ See Gornitzka, Ase, The Open Method of Coordination as practice – A watershed in European education policy? ARENA working paper No. 16, Oslo, December 2006.

⁴¹ Report from the Education Council to the European Council "The concrete future objectives of education and training systems" of 12.2.2001 and OJ C 142/1 of 14.6.2002

areas but the pace of reform remains a major challenge.⁴² Areas of good progress include putting in place: explicit lifelong learning strategies⁴³, national qualifications frameworks, which are linked to the establishment of the EQF⁴⁴ and systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

It is also clear, however, that while the Education and Training 2010 OMC has opened the way to intense co-operation and is perceived as successful in many aspects, there is a need to **improve implementation** when it comes to other aspects. Most notably, despite important progress being made, some of the agreed objectives will not be met by 2010 and, particularly, progress on four out of the five European benchmarks (please see Annex 1 for a full list of the benchmarks and the attached indicators) will not be sufficient to reach the targets set in 2003.

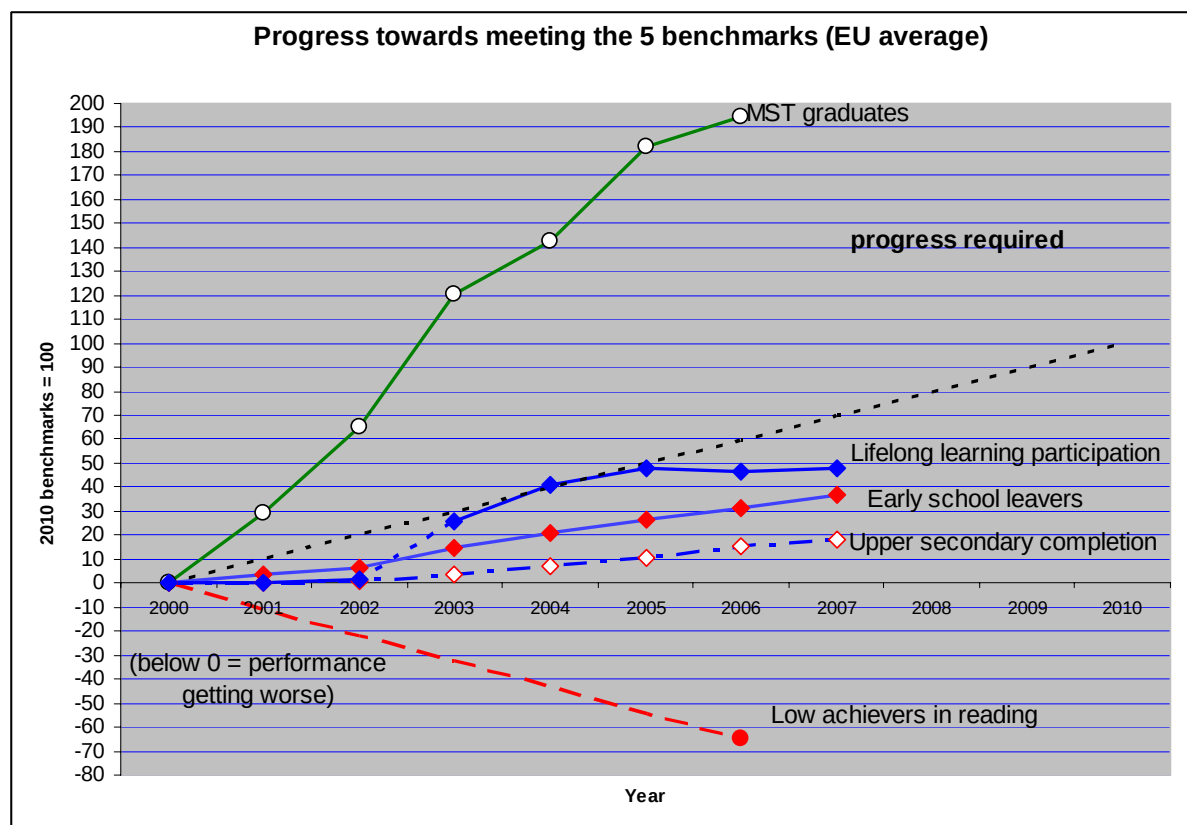


Figure 1

As illustrated in Figure 1 education and training systems in the EU are generally improving. The EU benchmark on mathematics, science and technology graduates was already reached in 2005. However no progress was achieved in relation to the sub-objective to reduce gender imbalance in this area. Yet although there is broad progress, attaining the benchmarks on early school leaving, completion of upper secondary education and lifelong learning by 2010 will need more effective national initiatives. Indeed the situation is getting worse for reading

⁴² 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme OJ C 86/1 of 5.4.2008;

⁴³ The Council agreed that Member States should have coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies in place by 2006 (Council resolution on lifelong learning of June 2002, 2004 Joint Report and 2005 Spring European Council).

⁴⁴ COM (2006) 479.

literacy of young people (PISA-results), the benchmark in the field of key competences. If the current trend holds up the benchmark on reading literacy will never be reached, the benchmark on participation in lifelong learning would be reached somewhere between 2015 and 2020, the benchmark on early school leavers would be reached around 2020 and finally the benchmark on upper secondary completion would be reached well after 2020. Currently 20 Member States have set national targets in some or all of the EU benchmark areas (further information on the current state of play of education and training including the progress and targets of individual countries can be found in the 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation"⁴⁵

Given that performance is very different between countries, there is a great potential for mutual learning at European level. It should be recalled that Member States' are fully responsible for their education and training systems. The EU's role is only a supporting one. As a consequence, any progress in this policy area is fully dependant on Member States' willingness to act and to pursue national reform (see also Section 4.1 on the Legal basis and the principle of subsidiarity). Member States' willingness to act and the way they pursue national reforms can however be influenced to a certain extent by the OMC. The main mechanisms through which the OMC can do this is through the identification of relevant problems and possible solutions for them, through mutual learning, the mobilisation of relevant stakeholders and, more generally, through raising political ambition. The setup of the OMC affects Member States' commitment to the process, their readiness to make use of its results and, finally, the chances for implementation of any policy recommendations resulting from it. The results of the consultations and the experience of the past years with the OMC in education and training, somewhat similar to the OMC in social protection and social inclusion⁴⁶, point to a number of weaknesses that can be summarised as follows:

– *Strengthening the focus, political commitment and visibility*

Although, there is a general consensus on the relevance of the 13 objectives agreed in 2001, at the same time there are doubts about their capacity to have a major impact on policy developments at national level. Ownership and visibility of these objectives at national level seems to be low. Countries see the need, on the one hand, for a more strategic approach and, on the other, for more flexible and focused immediate priorities which can be adapted to future challenges and newly emerging priorities.

The benchmarks have clearly created political commitment and visibility and 20 Member States have set up national targets in the EU benchmark areas. In most countries, the national reporting exercise under the OMC has however tended to be treated as an administrative obligation with limited relevance for the political level and focusing on developments that were happening anyway in the respective countries. Countries now find that a more thematic approach to the OMC reporting might make the exercise more interesting and useful and they suggest incorporating the search for and identification of best practice and, possibly, some degree of country comparison into the reports.

⁴⁵ Official Journal C 86/1 of 5.4.2008, SEC(2008) 2293, 10.7.2008

⁴⁶ Following the impact assessment SEC(2008) 2169 accompanying the Communication "A renewed commitment to social Europe: reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination in Social Protection and Social Inclusion" COM(2008) 418 it appears that the experiences with the OMCs are to a large extent similar.

Interest in concrete tools stemming from and developed through the process of co-operation has been high (i.e. Recommendation on Key Competences, the EQF, Europass) as has the interest in participating in working groups and peer learning activities. These tools and activities have been perceived as meaningful and useful to the civil servants and others who have participated. However one of the weaknesses identified is that the results have been inadequately disseminated to colleagues, policy-makers and Ministers.

– *Strengthening the involvement of stakeholders*

The involvement of stakeholders in policy making is an important factor securing ownership and promoting effective policy development and actual implementation in education and training. The degree to which social partners and stakeholders are involved in European and national decision-making varies considerably between countries and sectors of education and training. And even though the concept of partnership has been repeatedly stressed by the Commission and the Council, it does not yet seem to be strongly developed in all countries and all policy areas⁴⁷. Insufficient implementation and lack of political ownership are also related to problems concerning the involvement of stakeholders, especially those representing education and training providers, but also other groups such students, parents, economic actors and civil society in the broader sense.

The visibility of the OMC as such is not very high among stakeholders at European level, let alone the national level. Individual elements are visible and certain stakeholders have been involved in specific policy developments or implementation exercises (e.g. EQF, Europass), but, as overall impact will also depend on the visibility of the full programme that does not suffice.

– *Strengthening mutual learning*

Mutual learning is a key element of the OMC in education and training and its importance and benefits for national policy makers is widely appreciated. There is however considerable scope for increasing its impact on policy reforms through a better dissemination of the results to policy-makers and by raising its visibility and use at the political level. Peer learning and possible future peer-reviews also need to be more targeted towards addressing the most serious, relevant and pressing political priorities identified at the European and national levels in terms of policy development and implementation, including the national follow-up and use of the reference tools agreed at the European level. The current system for involving stakeholders in the peer learning activities is rather weak as it is up to the hosting country to invite local stakeholders to the peer learning activities. The increased involvement of stakeholders in peer learning could strengthen its impact.

– *Strengthening coordination across education and training sectors*

The lifelong learning (LLL) paradigm⁴⁸ is one of the main principles underlying the current OMC and it has been taken on board in all Member States' national policies to a greater or

⁴⁷ See also 2008 Joint Report, OJ C 86/1 of 5.4.2008.

⁴⁸ It was set out in the Commission's Communication "Making lifelong learning a reality" COM (2001) 678 which defined lifelong learning as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective".

lesser extent. In addition to underlining the importance of "cradle to grave" learning, the second essential element of the LLL concept is that it brings together the different education and training sectors while respecting their existence and specificities (e.g. schools, higher education, vocational education and training, adult learning). However, it emphasises that education and training policy must also deal with transversal issues which cannot be treated within these different sectors alone.

The OMC has nevertheless not always been able to assume a LLL coordination role across the different education and training sectors falling under the Education and Training 2010 work programme. While this is in part natural due to the specificities of the different sectors and associated stakeholders (e.g. the Copenhagen process for VET), it entails the risk of duplication, dispersion of effort and lack of coherence. It can also have negative effects on the achievement of central objectives formulated in the work programme, notably the development of coherent and comprehensive national lifelong learning strategies which ensure that the different areas of education and training are better linked to each other. This is reflected in weaknesses in LLL coordination at the European and at the national level where, in many countries, the different education and training policy areas continue to develop independently from each other.

Conclusions of section 2

The Lisbon policy challenges of the knowledge economy, demographic change and globalisation persist but issues such as migration and sustainability have become salient in later years. There are serious risks of mismatches between skills supply and demand, with shortages of high-skilled workers and insufficient qualification levels of low-skilled people. There is thus an urgent need to upgrade the skills of the workforce and of those at the risk of exclusion. There is hard economic evidence of the considerable benefits for the economy, society and the individual of investment in education and training, in terms of employability, social inclusion and citizenship, including the reduction of crime and improvement of health.

Education and training is a crucial factor in the Lisbon Strategy and its OMC has delivered concrete results, increasing countries participation in and benefits from European cooperation and reducing barriers to citizens' mobility and lifelong learning. However, major challenges and weaknesses in national systems still persist. There is a need to improve national implementation and thus the impact of the OMC on national systems by ensuring a stronger focus on immediate priorities, greater political commitment and visibility, better involvement of stakeholders, more effective mutual learning and stronger lifelong learning coordination across education and training sectors.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1. General Objective: improve overall skills levels

The overall objective of European cooperation in education and training is to raise the overall skills levels of the population and ensure that all citizens, irrespective of age or socio-economic background, have a realistic chance to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences needed to participate in society and ensure their employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. This will help to meet the challenges outlined in sections 2.1 and 2.2: the further development of the knowledge economy, demographic change, globalisation,

migration and sustainability. In particular, action is needed to raise employability and citizenship and to face potential skills mismatches. The OMC should help to make lifelong learning and mobility a reality, improve the quality and efficiency of education and training provision and outcomes, promote equity and citizenship, and enhance innovation and creativity at all levels of education and training.

This will also help to ensure that Europe can meet key goals of the Lisbon Strategy which includes the priorities "Investing in people and modernising labour markets" and "Investing in knowledge and innovation". It includes top level performance for some as well as a broad skills base in the population. And it will contribute to implementing the renewed Social Agenda, with its focus on increasing opportunities, providing access and solidarity with the most disadvantaged⁴⁹.

The timeframe for achieving this overall general objective will be rather long-term as reforms in education and training usually take many years to show measurable effects at the level of individuals. Progress can be monitored with a set of indicators and benchmarks, such as those which already exist under Education & Training 2010.

The impact of an updated framework for European cooperation on the final results in achieving these goals will, of course, depend on many factors. Some of these can be addressed more specifically and are discussed under the following objectives.

3.2. Intermediate objective: support Member States in reforming their education and training policies and systems

The key function of the OMC in education and training is to support countries in their educational reforms. Member States are themselves responsible for the organisation of their education and training systems. But against this background, the objective of the OMC is to spread best practice and achieve greater convergence in achieving the main EU goals. This method is designed to help Member States to develop progressively their own policies taking into account their specific circumstances⁵⁰. As described in sections 1.3 and 2.3, there is a wide consensus among countries that the OMC is useful in supporting national policy-making and that improvements are necessary and possible.

The timeframe for this objective is medium-term. The change to be achieved is to provide better and more targeted support to countries; support which is as useful as possible at any given point in time to the implementation of the reforms needed in each country based on the context and challenges it faces. Only if progress is made at the national level in all countries, will it be possible to obtain the overall objective of improving skills levels throughout the EU.

⁴⁹ COM(2008) 412

⁵⁰ The method involves fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms; establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice; translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences; periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

3.3. Operational objectives: improving the effectiveness and impact of the OMC in education and training

The third level would be the most operational and consist of addressing specific elements in the way the OMC works. The suggestions for improvements can be grouped under the following headings, based on the problems identified in section 2.3:

- To strengthen focus, political commitment and visibility.
- To strengthen the involvement of stakeholders.
- To strengthen mutual learning.
- To strengthen horizontal coordination across education and training sectors.

The timeframe for achieving the operational objective is fairly short-term. Most possible measures could be fully functioning within a year after the adoption of an updated strategic framework.

Conclusions of section 3

Three objectives are defined for an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training: raising overall skills levels (long-term), support countries in their education and training reforms (medium-term) and, finally, addressing specific elements to improve the effectiveness and impact of the OMC, notably through better focus, political commitment and visibility, stakeholder involvement, peer learning and horizontal coordination across education and training sectors (short-term).

4. POLICY OPTIONS

Four policy options arise from the challenges and objectives identified in sections 2 and 3 above. The four options are essentially described in terms of how the various measures under the OMC (in particular the setting of objectives, the organisation of mutual learning, monitoring and reporting, and the steering of the OMC) vary according to the option. They reflect differing degrees of education and training specificity, political commitment to the process of co-operation and investment in terms of resources.

The four options can be briefly described as follows:

Option 1: No specific OMC for education and training – abandon a specific OMC in education and training such as the Education & Training 2010 OMC and continue work under the overall Lisbon Strategy (notably guidelines 8, 15, 23 and 24).

Objectives would only be set under the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs. Peer-learning would be integrated into the existing mutual learning programmes, notably that forming part of the European Employment Strategy. Reporting would be organised exclusively via the reporting on the implementation of the Lisbon national reform programmes. Education and training actors and stakeholders would feed into the Lisbon process via the structures set up under the macroeconomic, microeconomic and employment pillars of the Lisbon strategy, i.e. the Economic Policy Committee and the Employment

Committee. The Education Committee would remain in place but its range of action would be limited (e.g. without joint progress reporting).

As a sub-option a specific peer-learning programme for education and training could be developed to focus separately on education and training under the integrated guidelines.

Option 2: Status quo (dynamic baseline scenario) - the OMC in education and training remains based on the objectives and working methods developed under the existing Education & Training 2010 OMC. It should be noted that the current OMC is not static but has a certain dynamic element built in as both policy priorities and working methods have undergone incremental changes based on the biennial joint progress reports and could also continue to do so in the future.

Under this option however the current set of basic objectives agreed in 2001 would remain stable. New challenges especially of a transversal nature such as migration or innovation and creativity could not be highlighted as specific priorities under the objectives agreed in 2001. Peer learning would continue to be organised under thematic clusters of countries interested in particular priorities as well as under the Copenhagen process. Reporting would continue to comprise biennial joint progress reports in their present format (i.e. overall progress reports supported by horizontal thematic assessments and annual reports on progress in relation to indicators and benchmarks). The operational coordination of the OMC would continue through the Education & Training 2010 co-ordination group. The Education & Training 2010 OMC would continue to feed into the Lisbon reporting process at both national and European level.

The OMC would continue to evolve through incremental changes on the basis of gradual adaptations of the immediate objectives and the working methods in the context of the biennial joint progress reports. The current OMC (the Education and Training 2010 work programme), however, only covers the period until 2010 and hence has an implicitly built in "sunset clause". Continuation of the current OMC beyond 2010 would hence also require a specific decision by the Commission and the Council.

Option 3: Updated strategic framework - an update would aim to rationalise, simplify and improve the effectiveness of the OMC both in terms of objective-setting and working methods.

An updated set of strategic objectives would be set to replace those agreed in 2002 and to increase the links between the challenges in education and training policy and the overall Lisbon process as well as the renewed Social Agenda. These long-term strategic objectives would be supported by a limited set of immediate and flexible priorities (e.g. for 2009-11) with a stronger focus and a better reflection of recent developments. Peer learning would also be streamlined and organised in a more lightweight and flexible way in order to adapt to the needs of specific themes and newly-emerging political priorities and the possibilities of performing peer-reviews will be explored. The biennial progress reports would include a stronger thematic focus and country-specific assessments providing a basis for the analysis of the education and training/skills component of the national Lisbon reform programmes and the preparation of the Lisbon country recommendations.

Although it would remain an informal body, the strategic role of the existing High Level Group in defining and coordinating the OMC (setting priorities, steering, monitoring and

coordination across sectors) would be strengthened, feeding into Education Council discussions and conclusions.

Option 4: A wider and deeper OMC - the OMC in education and training is expanded to develop simultaneous work in all dimensions and areas of education and training, including bilateral dialogue with all Member States, and the working methods would be reinforced in an ambitious manner.

On the assumption that all elements of education and training are equally important, the wider and deeper OMC would exclude no areas from ongoing cooperation at EU level (i.e. instead of the thematic focus of option 3). A new set of specific objectives covering all education and training dimensions and areas would be developed, each linked with European benchmarks and concrete national targets. Peer learning would cover all specific priorities at the same time (no thematic priorities), peer review would be used where necessary and, in general, the working methods would be expanded to cover all areas. Countries would be expected to take active part in any work where they might have useful experience thus increasing their contribution to other countries' policy development.

The focus on the specific developments in each country would be expanded considerably compared to option 3. Structured, bilateral dialogue, monitoring and progress reporting (including joint reports) would become annual (instead of biennial), including national action plans and country recommendations also under the education and training OMC.

A legislative proposal would be prepared to give the existing informal High Level Group a formal and higher political status similar to that of the Economic Policy Committee and the Employment Committee.

Coordination and coherence within education and training would be considerably enhanced to ensure that all processes are integrated as far as possible (e.g. the Copenhagen process would no longer continue separately) with the aim of achieving a fully consolidated lifelong learning policy framework at the European level. Mainstreaming and coordination of education and training with other policies (employment, social inclusion, innovation, enterprise, and research) would be strengthened considerably compared to option 3.

4.1. Legal basis and the principle of subsidiarity

The legal basis for the cooperation and support to Member States' policies in education and training and for this initiative can be found in articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty. The options that have been examined are not contingent upon the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty.

All the options fully respect the principle of **subsidiarity** and it is entirely up to the Member States whether or not to pursue and implement the common objectives at the national level, choosing measures suitable in the context of their respective circumstances. None of the proposals contained in any of the policy options departs from this principle even if they are different in terms of the level of political commitment, coordination and peer pressure they envisage. Any European recommendations, guidelines, instruments etc. will continue to be developed on a voluntary basis after full consultation of Member States and stakeholders. No sanctions are possible or desirable in the event a Member State not respecting them. No harmonisation is sought but a gradual convergence may continue.

The OMC in education and training is, therefore, built on Member States' voluntary political commitment, in order to achieve better policy outcomes, to co-operate with and be supported by each other and the Commission, based on broad common objectives and mutual learning. Member States have found that the current OMC has provided **added value** (in particular in relation to supporting national reforms with the help of concrete tools developed through the process of co-operation, i.e. the recommendation on key competences, the EQF, Europass) and have expressed keen interest in continued cooperation on these terms on key issues in education and training. As described in section 2.3, they see the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the OMC in certain ways to achieve better outcomes. As all the policy options are defined within the OMC, countries can decide precisely how far they want to go and to what extent they want to commit themselves. Given the major challenges facing education and training systems and their crucial importance to the Lisbon Strategy and the renewed Social Agenda, all of the options are considered **proportional**. However, given that education and training policies, especially on the organisation of national school systems, are sensitive in terms of Member States' responsibilities, option 4 is controversial for certain countries because of the level of political commitment and co-operation Member States would be invited to accept across the board, including a much more ambitious set of European benchmarks.

Conclusions of section 4

Four policy options are defined: no specific OMC for education and training, the status quo, an updated strategic framework and a wider and deeper OMC. They each demand a different type of commitment from countries and workload in terms of co-operation activities but all respect the principle of subsidiarity and are proportional to the major challenges facing education and training within the Lisbon Strategy and renewed Social Agenda.

5. ANALYSIS OF IMPACT

The purpose of this initiative is to set out an overall policy response, through the OMC, to the challenges facing European education and training. Given the voluntary nature of the instrument (see Section 4.1 on the Legal basis and the principle of subsidiarity), impact could be analysed in several ways.

Firstly, in terms of **national policy making**, countries have confirmed that the current OMC has been useful in supporting national policymaking in a number of ways, especially in terms of knowledge and evidence, and that its effectiveness can be improved (see sections 1.3 and 2.3). Countries are however hesitant to confirm clear causal linkages between the OMC and their general policies except when it comes to very concrete tools such as the Recommendation on Key Competences⁵¹ and, especially, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).⁵² The EQF is proving to be a dynamic catalyst for policy reform based on emerging national qualification frameworks in nearly all countries, systems for the validation on non-formal and informal learning and a gradual move towards the introduction of a learning outcomes approach.

⁵¹ OJ L 394/10 of 30.12.2006

⁵² OJ C 111/1 of 6.5.2008

Secondly, a similar conclusion could be arrived at in terms of **policy convergence**, where one can identify specific areas of convergence such as the gradual development of national lifelong learning strategies or the momentum towards the modernisation of higher education, although in this case it is difficult to distinguish between the effect of the OMC organised under the auspices of the EU and the intergovernmental Bologna Process.

Thirdly, the most difficult assessment is whether the OMC is responsible for certain **policy outcomes**: for example does the OMC contribute to increasing literacy or reducing early school leaving? Although the final aim is to improve such outcomes, it is difficult to assess the impact of the OMC on the performance of education and training systems in terms of the European average benchmarks (which is currently disappointing) or of national targets (which do not exist in all countries) due to the multitude of contributing factors.

Although there is clear evidence of the economic and social impact of education and training (see section 2.2), the economic and social impact of the OMC itself cannot always be measured in quantitative terms (and the future environmental impact of education leading to innovation in clean technologies is even more indirect and difficult to measure). Therefore, the appraisal of the proposed initiative is more of a qualitative evaluation of the potential effects of the OMC than of its immediate consequences on policy outcomes, whether economic, social or environmental.

This proposal is mainly concerned with improving the effectiveness and impact of the OMC, both in terms of policy objectives and working methods. In this context, the pertinent question is: will this proposal make the OMC a more effective tool for European cooperation in education and training within the context of the Lisbon and renewed Social Agendas, and for the achievement of common objectives and the reform of national policies and systems? On this basis, the following assessments are made on the four options in relationship to the three objectives defined in section 3 (for a tabled overview of the likely impact of the four options in relation to each of the objectives described in section 3 see table 3 in Annex 2):

Option 1: No specific OMC for education and training

General assessment

The Lisbon guidelines 8, 15, 23 and 24 have a strong education and training content (human capital development) and work to support countries education and training policies could be carried out under these guidelines. It would, however, have two complications. Firstly, these guidelines only address directly some objectives of education, primarily those related to employment and competitiveness, while other key objectives, for example equity, citizenship and creativity, are not specified. Secondly, the work on implementing the guidelines is managed by the ministries of employment and does not include education ministries and stakeholders. This would increase the problem of inadequate ownership and political commitment by the education and training world and, most likely, would reduce the overall impact. Adding a sub-option of a separate peer-learning programme could compensate somewhat for stakeholders but it would still be insufficient because of the lack of political steering / commitment and the diminished status of the social, cultural and creative dimensions of education and training. It would thus, in reality, become a "do less" option which would not match the need for strong political focus on education and training in the Lisbon and renewed Social Agendas.

Assessment in relations to intermediate and operational objectives

The objective of supporting countries in their education and training policy reforms could be met to some extent as countries would still be supported through the Lisbon process. The risk is that work would be too disconnected from the actual work undertaken in education ministries (ministries of employment, finance and economic affairs are in the lead in most countries) and also in educational institutions. It would not cover some of their major concerns (e.g. citizenship and intercultural dialogue) as it would only focus on lifelong learning from an employability perspective.

As for the objective of improving the functioning of the OMC in education and training a specific OMC for education and training would be abandoned under this option and action would be restricted to the areas covered by the guidelines for jobs and growth. This would mean greater focus, but the risk is that important stakeholders would disagree with that particular choice. This would risk increasing the problem of ownership and political commitment of key education and training stakeholders whose contribution is important to ensure implementation and impact. As there is a substantial consensus around the positive results of the OMC in education and training and the wish to improve and strengthen it, the abandonment of the specific OMC in education and training could also result in the loss of an important '*acquis*'. It would be difficult to involve a number of stakeholders to whom the focus on jobs and growth is too narrow. These stakeholders would insist on also dealing with other key dimension. It would be difficult to actually strengthening mutual learning under this option, as it will be more difficult to address the specific needs of education and training actors and stakeholders (although this could be partially addressed by having a specific education training peer learning programme). Better horizontal coordination between different sectors of education and training (schools, vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning) would be equally difficult as this objective is too specific to be addressed in the overall broad-based Lisbon strategy.

Option 2: Status quo

General assessment

This option has proved to have been useful with some results but the impact has been insufficient due to inadequate national visibility, political commitment and implementation, and also insufficient stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, the original detailed objectives do not currently reflect fully the current priorities and work actually being done under the existing OMC. Without an updating strategic framework, an increased focus and greater flexibility, the existing work programme would continue to be out of touch with current challenges and future needs, the renewed Social Agenda and Member States' recent requests for an improved OMC in education and training.

Assessment in relations to intermediate and operational objectives

The objective of supporting countries in their education and training policy reforms has clearly been met to a certain extent under the current OMC and with good results, but not enough to ensure sufficient impact, except in very specific areas.

Improving the functioning of the OMC in education and training would be difficult under the current OMC as the detailed objectives agreed in 2001 no longer reflect fully the priorities done at this point in time. Continuing with the existing work programme would thus not

reflect the current and increase the problems of ensuring political commitment and visibility. In particular, new challenges such as migration or creativity and innovation could not be highlighted as specific priorities under the objectives agreed in 2001. This option would also not sufficiently address the weaknesses of the current OMC. The European social partners are currently fully involved, while European stakeholders in education and training do not participate in all activities and show a lack of commitment to the OMC. Mutual learning already exists, but the problem of insufficient flexibility, visibility, impact and political follow-up would not be addressed. Horizontal coordination across areas has experienced some success through promoting the concept of lifelong learning, but there are still parallel developments in the different education and training sectors (schools, VET, HE, adults) both at the European and national levels.

Option 3: Updated strategic framework

General assessment

This option takes into account that, although the original challenges to education and training systems remain, new ones have emerged as have certain weaknesses of the current OMC. Countries are supportive of the education and training OMC as an instrument for co-operation and reform but have pointed to a number of potential improvements to its effectiveness which could be addressed in a clearly visible way in this option. An updated strategic framework would ensure that the OMC could be strengthened and working methods streamlined while the degree of coordination and development at EU level would remain at an acceptable level for Member States. The OMC would become a more strategic and flexible tool supporting the Lisbon and Social Agendas and, thus, could become more dynamic with a greater impact at the higher political levels and on policy outcomes for the benefit of citizens, the economy and society.

Assessment in relations to intermediate and operational objectives

The objective of supporting countries in their education and training policy reforms could be strengthened by being more prioritised and focused on specific and relevant needs. More focus on immediate priorities could increase impact. Countries have expressed support for the idea of such an updated strategic framework linked more closely to the Lisbon and renewed Social Agendas.

To improve the functioning of the OMC in education and training a simplified work programme in terms of fewer but more strategic objectives could increase attention and commitment. Countries are supportive of the OMC but have requested improvements which this option would provide. An updated framework would strengthen the OMC while the coordination and development at EU level would remain at an acceptable level to countries. A more systematic involvement of relevant stakeholders in thematic peer learning and policy development, and in consultation on the steering of the OMC, could increase their commitment and their contribution to implementing the objectives. More flexible and lightweight methods with planned outputs could allow more effective mutual learning on newly-emerging priorities. Enhancing the role of the High Level Group could improve the strategic steering of peer learning on priorities and ensure better use of its results for policy-making and Ministers. A new set of strategic objectives with a lifelong perspective, covering all education and training sectors and enhancing the role of the High Level Group could contribute to achieving better coordination across education and training sectors.

Option 4: A wider and deeper OMC

General assessment

While this option could increase the potential impact, it could also be unrealistic and over-ambitious. In particular, given the political sensitivity of the policy area, some countries might not be willing to accept and endorse this level of political commitment, activity and scrutiny of their performance. Also, it would demand considerably increased human resources from both Member States and the Commission at a time of tight budgetary constraints. The option is so ambitious in terms of resource implications that it is actually likely to be counterproductive in terms of achieving the defined objectives.

Assessment in relations to working methods objectives

Support to countries would be increased substantially as work would be done in all areas of education and training. This option would, however, run the risk of overburdening administrations and education and training systems because it requires co-operation on a very broad range of topics at the same time and therefore a heavy commitment in terms of human resources for both Member States and the Commission.

When it comes to the objective of improving the functioning of the OMC such a comprehensive approach requiring all countries to get involved in a large number of topics would be the opposite of increasing focus. It is unlikely that countries would agree to such a broad approach. They expressed clear interest in a more selective approach, i.e. to concentrate on issues that they regard as high political priorities also at the national level. There may be a high degree of visibility, but it is doubtful that this would actually improve implementation, as it will be less likely to meet national priorities. Some countries might also feel that this option starts to come into conflict with the principle of proportionality. There would be a certain potential for involving stakeholders better but again this would require substantial resources as work would be done in many areas at the same time. This option might strengthen mutual learning, but participation in a comprehensive set of peer learning activities across many areas would be too resource intensive for both Member States and the Commission. Strict coordination mechanisms would have to be put in place for this comprehensive option which could have positive impact.

Conclusions of section 5

The impact of the OMC on national policy making and policy convergence is challenging to assess for all four options. It is, in particular, difficult to show robust evidence of causal linkage between the OMC and national policy outcomes in terms of quantifiable results. Based on the experience to date, the current OMC is clearly perceived by Member States and stakeholders as contributing to national policy development but with areas requiring improvement. Strengthening its effectiveness through either option 3 or 4 would, therefore, most likely, increase its overall impact on the reform of national systems contributing to the Lisbon and renewed Social Agendas.

6. COMPARING THE OPTIONS

As a precise quantification of the economic, social and environmental impacts of the OMC itself is difficult, as explained earlier the four options are compared on the basis of their **impact on the objectives** to be achieved (see section 5) and on the basis of their **feasibility**. The concept of feasibility refers to: political acceptance, availability of human resources and the administrative burden, and the extent to which instruments are available. The estimates are rough as no elements are available to calculate precise impacts. Please note that a dynamic baseline scenario has been chosen to present a realistic picture of the current OMC. This means that also the current OMC can change incrementally through the biennial joint progress reports hence some progress might be possible even under this scenario. The ranking of impacts and feasibility is defined as in the table below:

Table 1 - Ranking criteria

	++	+	0	-	--
Impact	positive impact	small positive impact	neutral impact	small negative impact	negative impact
Feasibility	feasible	more or less feasible	feasibility difficult to assess	slightly difficult	difficult

Table 2 - Comparing the policy options with regard to the impact on the problems addressed and the rating of feasibility

Objective to be achieved	Rating of impact on the problems addressed in terms of objectives (based on section 5 and Table 3 in Annex 2)				Rating of feasibility			
	No specific OMC for education and training (Option 1)	Status quo (Option 2) DYNAMIC BASELINE	Updated strategic framework (Option 3)	Wider and deeper OMC (Option 4)	No specific OMC for education and training (Option 1)	Status quo (Option 2) DYNAMIC BASELINE	Updated strategic framework (Option 3)	Wider and deeper OMC (Option 4)
Improve skills levels in the population (including citizenship etc.)	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-
Support countries in reforming their education and training policies	-	+	++	++	0	+	++	+
Improve the functioning of the OMC in education and training	- -	0	++	+	- -	0	++	+

Based on the description and analysis of impacts and feasibility in the tables 1 and 3 the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the four options:

Option 1: No specific OMC for education and training

The Lisbon guidelines 8, 15, 23 and 24 have a strong education and training content (human capital) and work to support countries education and training policies could be carried out under these guidelines. As illustrated in table 3 the option would, however, fall short of impact expectations due to a certain disconnection with stakeholders in education and training. Furthermore, it cannot be considered feasible as it would not reflect the political mandate for a high political profile for education and training not only in the Lisbon Strategy but also in the renewed Social Agenda. Finally, it would not meet the expectations of countries and stakeholders for a comprehensive lifelong learning definition of the relevant dimensions in education and training (including equity, citizenship and creativity) or their requests for a strengthened OMC in education and training.

Option 2: Status quo

While this option has been useful and produced positive results, the impact has been insufficient due to inadequate national visibility, political commitment and implementation and also insufficient stakeholder involvement. It would, of course, continue to have a certain impact but this would be insufficient given persistent problems and new challenges. Furthermore, the original detailed objectives do not adequately reflect the work currently being done under the OMC.

Option 3: Updated strategic framework

Countries are supportive of the OMC but have pointed to a number of areas where they would like to see it strengthened. They have also indicated their support for a more strategic approach. This option would meet the demands for a more strategic and dynamic approach and would attract more political attention and commitment which should increase impact. An updated strategic framework would provide a stronger and more effective OMC while the coordination and development at EU level would remain at an acceptable level to countries.

Option 4: A wider and deeper OMC

The potential impact of this comprehensive option would be high were it not for the considerable extra political and administrative commitment expected from countries. The increased cooperation would provide expanded support to countries but the OMC would become so all-encompassing that but it could be very difficult to manage. Both the level of commitment in terms of extra human resources and the sensitivity of such an approach for Member States undermine the feasibility of this option.

Conclusions of section 6

While the different options all have their advantages, it is clear that only option 3 meets the demands for the OMC to have a greater impact on increasing overall skills levels and on national reforms of education and training systems and to become a more effective instrument of co-operation and policy development. This option is also feasible.

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As indicated in section 5, the results and impacts of the OMC in education and training can be principally monitored and evaluated in terms of the **impact on both national policy-making and policy convergence**. Policy outputs can be primarily monitored as direct outcomes of the national systems.

Evaluation of the OMC would normally take place through biennial joint progress reports and adaptations will be made on a regular basis. However, the definitive reporting mechanism of the updated framework would be determined in the context of future discussions on the Lisbon strategy.

To monitor the impacts of an updated strategic framework on national policy-making, one instrument is already available: biennial national reports as input to the OMC's biennial joint progress reports. This would, as far as possible, be strengthened and adapted to the needs of an updated framework. No new instruments are needed. On a regular basis, the High Level Group representing Member States would assume a more comprehensive and strategic role, providing feedback and monitoring, ensuring coherence and coordination of the OMC and advising the Education Council.

The monitoring and evaluation of policy convergence and outcomes would take place via the biennial joint progress reports and, especially for policy outcomes, via the annual progress reports on indicators and benchmarks. The effectiveness of the biennial joint progress reports would benefit from a new emphasis on thematic priorities and by including assessments of the situation in individual countries.

Dialogue and consultations with the European social partners and education and training stakeholders will be expanded and structured through annual Stakeholders' Forums. This would constitute a change from the current OMC where they have been involved more on an individual basis, in smaller groups or on a case by case basis. This would provide an additional basis for feedback to monitor the actual results and impact of the OMC.

Possible success indicators on the OMC could be:

- Successful consensus building on key policy initiatives and on coordination across sectors
- The extent to which we can identify policy developments in Member States related to the areas in which peer learning has taken place
- Increased interest by national stakeholders to respond to awareness raising calls (awareness of the policy priorities)
- Regular and fruitful dialogue with European stakeholders through annual Stakeholders' Forum's and through the successful set-up of a Lifelong learning Platform (a platform of European civil society stakeholders in the field of lifelong learning which would provide a more stable basis for contributions to policy development, the identification of best practices and function as a multiplier vis-à-vis stakeholders and civil society in general at national level).

Conclusions of section 7

The mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact on national policy-making, policy convergence and policy outcomes of the OMC in education and training already exist in the form of biennial joint progress reports and annual reports on indicators and benchmarks. Their effectiveness would be strengthened by an emphasis on thematic priorities, the inclusion of country assessments and improved feedback from Member States and stakeholders.

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ANNEX 1: OVERVIEW OF THE OBJECTIVES AND THE BENCHMARKS AND CORE INDICATORS IN THE CURRENT OMC "EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010"

Overview of the objectives of the current OMC "Education and Training 2010"

"Future objectives of education and training systems" (2001):

1. Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems

- 1.1 Improving education and training for teachers
- 1.2 Developing skills for the knowledge society
- 1.3 Ensuring access to ICT for everyone
- 1.4 Increasing recruitment to scientific and technical studies
- 1.5 Making best use of resources

2. Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems

- 2.1 Creating an open learning environment
- 2.2 Making learning attractive
- 2.3 Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion

3. Opening up education and training systems to the wider world

- 3.1 Strengthening the links with work and research and society at large
- 3.2 Developing the spirit of enterprise
- 3.3. Improving foreign language learning
- 3.4 Increasing mobility and exchange
- 3.5 Strengthening European co-operation

Overview of benchmarks and core indicators currently in use in "Education and Training 2010"

Benchmarks set in 2003

The reference levels of European average performance (benchmarks), to be achieved by 2010, are:

- Not more than 10% early school leavers;
- To cut the percentage of low-achieving pupils in literacy by at least 20%;
- At least 85% of young people to complete upper secondary education;
- Increase the number of university graduates in mathematics, science and technology (MST) by at least 15%, and to decrease the gender imbalance in these subjects;
- 12.5% of the adult population should participate in lifelong learning.

Core indicators

1. Participation in pre-school education
2. Special needs education
3. Early school leavers
4. Literacy in reading, mathematics and science

5. Language skills
6. ICT skills
7. Civic skills
8. Learning to learn skills
9. Upper secondary completion rates of young people
10. Professional development of teachers and trainers
11. Higher education graduates
12. Cross-national mobility of students in higher education
13. Participation of adults in lifelong learning
14. Adult skills
15. Educational attainment of the population
16. Investment in education and training

ANNEX 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010 WORK PROGRAMME

The Education and Training 2010 work programme in its current form provides a framework for policy cooperation between Member States and the Commission in education and training. The main elements of the open method of co-ordination (OMC) in education and training are (1) a set of common objectives, (2) a process of reporting and monitoring on progress, (3) peer learning, and (4) agenda-setting Communications from the Commission and (5) the development of EU reference tools supporting national reforms (e.g. the recommendations on key competences, on quality assurance in vocational education and training or higher education or the European Qualifications Framework. These actions are complemented by pilot actions and the testing of new approaches through the Lifelong Learning Programme.

Common objectives

One of the crucial milestones for EU cooperation in education and training was the definition by the Council in 2002 of **thirteen objectives** (please see annex 1 of this report for an overview of the 13 objectives) grouped around **three strategic goals** 1. Quality and effectiveness 2. Access for all 3. Opening up to the wider world. These objectives guided work in the initial phase of the work programme and in particular the setting up of specific thematic working groups (2002-2005).

Another milestone was the adoption in May 2003 of **five European benchmarks** (please see annex 1 of this report for a list of the 16 core indicators attached to the benchmarks) to be achieved by 2010: (1) No more than 10% early school leavers; (2) Decrease of at least 20% in the percentage of low-achieving pupils in reading literacy; (3) At least 85% of young people should have completed upper secondary education; (4) Increase of at least 15% in the number of tertiary graduates in Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST), with a simultaneous decrease in the gender imbalance; (5) 12.5% of the adult population should participate in lifelong learning.

The 13 objectives have however never been the only policy framework guiding education and training policy cooperation at the European level. Other detailed objectives were set in the

- 2000 **Action Plan for Mobility** / 2001 **Recommendation** of the European Parliament and of the Council **on mobility** for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers;
- the **lifelong learning** communication and resolution of 2001 and 2002;
- the **Copenhagen** process for European cooperation in vocational education and training established in 2002;
- the intergovernmental **Bologna** process and, since 2003, with a growing recognition of the importance of higher education for the **Lisbon** agenda, important agenda-setting Communications from the Commission and subsequent Council resolutions in **higher education**.
- The 2006 Commission Communication and Council resolution on "Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems"
- The 2006/07 **Communication and action plan for adult learning**.

In addition, as the EU's overall strategy for education and training takes place within the broader **Lisbon process**, the EU's priorities for education and training are also defined in the Lisbon **integrated guidelines** for jobs and growth which include important references to innovation (GL 8), entrepreneurship education (GL 15), investment in human capital (GL 23) and adapting education and training systems in response to new competence requirements (GL 24).

Hence, since the adoption of the first joint progress report in 2004, the biennial reporting process fulfils an important function of bringing together, under a **single umbrella**, these different strands of policy development. In reality, however, there is a natural tension between the different education and training sectors (schools, VET, HE, adult learning) operating independently and the need to address cross-cutting issues.

Finally, all three joint reports adopted since 2004 have also had the important function of **defining new priorities** for the next 2 years ahead and thus to adapt the political objectives in view of newly emerging issues. This has step-by-step modified the role of the 13 objectives as guiding principles of the OMC.

The policy paradigm which has been central for the OMC in education and training during the last years is **lifelong learning**. The lifelong learning paradigm has had the merit of attracting our attention both to the very early (pre-primary) and later phases of learning in the life-cycle (continuing training, adult learning). Its main distinctive feature, however, is its holistic approach. While allowing for a focus on different education and training sectors (e.g. schools, higher education, VET, adults), it emphasises that education and training policy must deal with transversal issues which cannot be treated in these different sectors alone; it raises the issues of the relation between formal, non-formal and informal learning⁵³ and the interactions between different sectors. Examples of such transversal issues are:

- Which type of key competences are needed to prepare people for learning at later times of their life?
- How to improve transition between the different education and training sectors and flexible career pathways (e.g. through the promotion of a learning outcomes approach)?
- How does the performance of a particular sector, e.g. schools, affect citizens' access to other levels, e.g. higher education or adult learning/continuing training?
- How to assess and set policy priorities for education and training policies as a whole?

The lifelong learning paradigm has been enhanced by the 2006 Commission Communication and Council resolution on **efficiency and equity** in education and training. As it demonstrated, the dual challenge of efficiency and equity can actually be used to address individual E&T sectors separately while it can also be used to look at E&T systems as a whole.

⁵³ This is often referred to as the dimension of "lifewide" learning

Monitoring and reporting

Indicators and benchmarks play an essential role in Education and Training 2010. They are key elements of evidence-based policy making and the monitoring of progress essential to the Lisbon process. Thus a comprehensive set of indicators and benchmarks has been developed as a basis for the biennial Joint reports of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of Education and Training 2010 and the preparation of the Commission's annual progress reports on indicators and benchmarks.

In May 2003, the Education Council adopted five European average performance benchmarks in the areas of early school leaving, reading literacy, secondary attainment, mathematics, science and technology graduates and adults' participation in lifelong learning. In May 2007, it concluded on a coherent framework of 16 core indicators for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives⁵⁴.

Since 2004, Member States reports every two years on the implementation of the work programme at national level, on the basis of which the Council and the Commission adopt a Joint Report on the overall progress in implementing Education and Training 2010, including the identification of policy priorities for the immediate future. National reports are analysed in detail in a Staff Working Document supporting the Commission's Draft Joint Report which provides a horizontal thematic analysis by education and training sector⁵⁵.

In addition, the Commission produces every year a Staff Working Document on progress made in relation to the indicators and benchmarks⁵⁶.

Finally, education and training also has a prominent place in many countries' Lisbon national reform programmes for growth and jobs and the related reports. These are assessed in the Commission's Lisbon Annual Progress Reports and followed-up, where appropriate, by country-specific recommendations of the Council⁵⁷ on education, training, lifelong learning and skills. It follows therefore that national reporting in the area of education and training and under the Lisbon process should be closely linked.

Peer learning activities, clusters, working groups and networks

Peer learning as defined in the Lisbon strategy in 2000 is a central element of the OMC in education and training and, as confirmed by the discussions in the Education Council, is seen as a crucial tool with considerable potential to support education and training reforms. In order to improve and streamline the OMC, the question is how to organise peer learning in the most efficient and effective way so that it has a real impact – the 2008 Joint Report stressed the importance of "ensuring that the results of peer-learning activities reach policy makers and ministers". And how to ensure that it is flexible and lightweight enough to respond to evolving high-level priorities within a limited timescale.

The existing peer learning activities (PLAs) under Education and Training 2010 are mainly organised, planned and prepared through 8 thematic clusters (groups of countries with a

⁵⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:311:0013:0015:EN:PDF>

⁵⁵ For the 2008 Joint Progress Report see Official Journal C 86/1 of 5.4. 2008

⁵⁶ Latest Progress Report – Indicators and benchmarks 2008, SEC (2008) 2293

⁵⁷ Recommendations based on articles 99 and 128 of the Treaty

particular interest in a given topic). The clusters, which effectively started peer learning in 2006, were designed as a lighter structure (each Member State only participating in a limited number of clusters) than the previous working groups established in 2001 which addressed the 13 common objectives.

The cluster themes and priorities in 2005/06⁵⁸ were agreed with Member States. While several of the clusters aimed to support the national implementation of agreed European principles (e.g. the key competences recommendation), others aim to build a reflection on new thematic priorities (e.g. higher education, access and social inclusion, learning outcomes). On average each cluster has organised 4 meetings per annum, including peer learning activities hosted by Member States.

The clusters are not, however, the only European education and training groups organising peer-learning activities. For example, peer-learning has also been carried out under the Copenhagen process as a result of meetings of the Directors General for Vocational Education and Training and the recently created adult learning working group will also initiate peer learning. In the area of quality assurance (for higher education and VET) and guidance, EU reference tools are also followed up by European networks managed by Member States (ENQA-HE, ENQA-VET, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network).

Steering of the process

The political steering of the OMC takes place through the Council and, since 2005, the implementation and coordination of the OMC is in the hands of the **Education and Training 2010 Coordination Group** (ETCG)⁵⁹. In addition, since 2002, a **High Level Group** with representatives of all Member States is convened at least twice a year on the initiative of upcoming presidencies to discuss the political priorities of these presidencies in the field of education and training, including key issues arising concerning the OMC and its future development.

⁵⁸ The clusters deal with the following issues: Modernising Higher Education, Best use of Resources, Teachers and Trainers, Access and Social Inclusion, Math, Science and Technology, Key Competences, ICT, Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

⁵⁹ Members of the ETCG are all participating countries and the European social partners.

ANNEX 3: TABLE 3 - OVERVIEW OF THE FOUR OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN TERMS OF IMPACT

Objective to be achieved	<u>Option 1</u> <u>No specific OMC for education and training</u>	<u>Option 2</u> <u>Status quo (baseline scenario)</u>	<u>Option 3</u> <u>Updated strategic framework</u>	<u>Option 4</u> <u>Wider and deeper OMC</u>
Improve skill levels in the population	The objective would not be fully met as action would be limited to certain objectives of education and training covered by the guidelines for jobs and growth. Questionable whether the whole population and all forms and levels of education and training could be addressed.	It is difficult to prove that the current OMC has contributed directly but, in any event, there has been insufficient national progress towards this objective (see lack of results compared to benchmarks, section 2.3). Improvements could be made within the current method, but these might not be sufficient to contribute to significant progress.	If objectives were set more strategically, with a limited number of pertinent high-level objectives and national targets, and the working methods were made more effective, the overall impact of the OMC on this objective could be enhanced.	Objective could, in theory be met, in particular as all areas are potentially important to the success of education and training systems. But this would depend on overcoming difficulties in terms of Member States' commitment to this option and its practical implementation.
Support countries in reforming their education and training policies	Countries would continue to be supported through the Lisbon process. The risk is that work would be too disconnected from the actual work undertaken in education ministries (ministries of employment, finance and economic affairs are in the lead in most countries) and also in educational institutions. It would not cover some of their major concerns as it would only focus on lifelong learning from an employability perspective.	Has already provided support to countries and with good results, but not enough to ensure sufficient impact, except in certain specific areas.	Support could be more prioritised and focused on specific and relevant needs. More focus on immediate priorities could increase impact. Countries have expressed support for the idea of such an updated strategic framework linked more closely to the Lisbon and renewed Social Agendas.	Support to countries would be increased substantially as work would be done in all areas of education and training. This option would, however, run the risk of overburdening administrations and education and training systems because it requires co-operation on a very broad range of topics at the same time and therefore a heavy commitment in terms of human resources.
Improve the functioning of the OMC in education and training •				

Objective to be achieved	<u>Option 1</u> <u>No specific OMC for education and training</u>	<u>Option 2</u> <u>Status quo (baseline scenario)</u>	<u>Option 3</u> <u>Updated strategic framework</u>	<u>Option 4</u> <u>Wider and deeper OMC</u>
To strengthen focus, political commitment and visibility	As a specific OMC for education and training would be abandoned, action would be restricted to the areas covered by the guidelines for jobs and growth. This would mean greater focus, but the risk is that important stakeholders would disagree with that particular choice. This would risk increasing the problem of ownership and political commitment of key education and training stakeholders whose contribution is important to ensure implementation and impact. As there is a substantial consensus around the positive results of the OMC in education and training and the wish to improve and strengthen it, the abandonment of the specific OMC in education and training could also result in the loss of an important 'acquis'.	As the detailed objectives agreed in 2002 no longer reflect the actual work being done at this point in time, continuing with the existing work programme would not reflect the current OMC and increase the problems of ensuring political commitment and visibility. This option would not sufficiently address the weaknesses of the current OMC.	A simplified work programme in terms of fewer but more strategic objectives could increase attention and commitment. Visibility would be strengthened by setting a small number of high level political objectives. Countries are supportive of the OMC but have requested improvements which this option would provide. An updated framework would strengthen the OMC while the coordination and development at EU level would remain at an acceptable level to countries.	Such a comprehensive approach would be the opposite of increasing focus. It is unlikely that countries would agree to such an approach for reasons related to the resources needed for its implementation and because they already prefer a more selective approach, i.e. to concentrate on issues that they regard as high political priorities also at the national level. There may be a high degree of visibility, but it is doubtful that this would actually improve implementation, as it will be less likely to meet national priorities. Some countries might also feel that this option starts to come into conflict with the principle of proportionality.
To strengthening the involvement of stakeholders.	Many education and training stakeholders would not be attracted, as they will find the focus on jobs and growth too narrow and would insist on also dealing with the other key dimension	The European social partners are fully involved, while European stakeholders in education and training do not participate in all activities and show a lack of commitment to the OMC.	A more systematic involvement of relevant stakeholders in thematic peer learning and policy development, and in consultation on the steering of the OMC, could increase their commitment and their contribution to implementing the objectives.	Potentially positive impact.

Objective to be achieved	<u>Option 1</u> <u>No specific OMC for education and training</u>	<u>Option 2</u> <u>Status quo (baseline scenario)</u>	<u>Option 3</u> <u>Updated strategic framework</u>	<u>Option 4</u> <u>Wider and deeper OMC</u>
Strengthening mutual learning	Hard to achieve under this option, as it will be more difficult to address the specific needs of education and training actors and stakeholders (although this could be partially addressed by having a specific education training peer learning programme).	Peer learning already exists, but the problem of insufficient flexibility, visibility, impact and political follow-up would not be addressed.	More flexible and lightweight methods with planned outputs could allow more effective work on newly-emerging priorities. Enhancing the role of the High Level Group could improve the strategic steering of peer learning on priorities and ensure better use of its results for policy-making and Ministers.	Potentially positive, but participation in a comprehensive set of peer learning activities across many areas would be too resource intensive for both Member States and the Commission.
Strengthening coordination across education and training sectors.	Would be difficult to meet as this objective is too specific to be addressed in the overall broad-based Lisbon strategy.	Some success through promoting the concept of lifelong learning, but there are still parallel developments in the different education and training sectors (schools, VET, HE, adults) both at the European and national levels.	A new set of strategic objectives with a lifelong perspective, covering all education and training sectors and enhancing the role of the High Level Group could contribute to achieving this objective.	Potentially positive impact.

