

(98/C 196/23)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-3759/97****by Graham Mather (PPE) to the Commission***(21 November 1997)**Subject:* EU/US cooperation in lifelong learning

1996 was the European Year of Lifelong Learning last year. Although the Commission's official report has yet to be published, a number of key issues were identified, and one of the report's main conclusions will undoubtedly be that the Commission's strategy of seeking to mainstream the concept and practice of lifelong learning is correct and should therefore be pursued urgently. It is equally clear, however, that the US is particularly advanced in this sphere and we can therefore learn important lessons from the American approach to, and experience of, lifelong learning. In view of this:

1. Does the Commission intend to launch an initiative to encourage EU/US cooperation on lifelong learning, along the lines of the current EU/US Cooperation Agreement in Higher Education and Vocational Training, or indeed extend this agreement to specifically cover lifelong learning?
2. Will high priority be attached to lifelong learning in the Commission's current Benchmarking initiative (COM(97) 153)?

**Answer given by Mrs Cresson on behalf of the Commission***(8 January 1998)*

Lifelong learning is about helping individuals to realise their personal potential, helping companies and organisations to benefit from new and improved skills throughout their workforce, managing change and competing successfully in a global arena. The Commission has incorporated this message into its thinking on the full range of education and training activities.

In fact, the idea of lifelong learning is already integrated into the concept of the Community-United States cooperation agreement in higher education and vocational training. In order to implement this notion more thoroughly, specific project proposals are sought by the Commission in the area of vocational training, to the extent that private firms can participate in projects as associate partners. Moreover, links with the United States community college system, especially regarding retraining and reskilling of middle-aged workers or work returnees, are encouraged.

The Honourable Member may find of interest the variety of projects supported so far under the Community-United States cooperation agreement which the Commission is forwarding direct to him and to the Secretariat general of the Parliament.

With regard to the second question, the annex of the Commission communication 'Benchmarking — implementation of an instrument available to economic actors and public authorities' <sup>(1)</sup> introduced four eligible themes for pilot projects on benchmarking. Three of them are related to skills and intangible investments ('Information and communications technology (ICT) and the new technological and organisational paradigm'; 'Financing of innovation, in particular of intellectual property', 'Development of human resources'). The dimension of life-long learning is important for intangible investments.

However, it should be pointed out that benchmarking projects are developed on the basis of proposals from Member States and the Commission has no way of ensuring that one or other theme will be adequately covered in future.

<sup>(1)</sup> COM(97) 153.