

What is lifelong learning?

*"When planning for a year, plant corn.
When planning for a decade, plant trees.
When planning for life, train and educate people."*

Chinese proverb: Guanzi (c. 645BC)

...from a European point of view?

On 21 November 2001, the Commission adopted a Communication on **Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality**. This Communication was jointly presented by Commissioners Reding and Diamantopoulou as a response to the mandate from the Feira European Council "to identify coherent strategies and practical measures with a view to fostering lifelong learning for all". In doing so, it makes an important contribution to achieving the strategic goal set at Lisbon for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world.

The scale of current economic and social change, the rapid transition to a knowledge-based society and demographic pressures resulting from an ageing population in Europe are all challenges which demand a new approach to education and training, within the framework of lifelong learning.

In the context of these challenges, lifelong learning was given a high priority at the Council meetings of *Lisbon* and *Stockholm*, and the Communication responds to the specific mandate of the Feira European Council.

Lifelong learning is defined in the Communication as "**all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.**"

Lifelong learning is therefore about:

- Acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post-retirement. It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future.
- valuing all forms of learning, including: formal learning, such as a degree course followed at university; non-formal learning, such as vocational skills acquired at the workplace; and informal learning, such as inter-generational learning, for example where parents learn to use ICT through their children, or learning how to play an instrument together with friends.

Learning opportunities should be available to all citizens on an ongoing basis. In practice this should mean that citizens each have individual learning pathways, suitable to their needs and interests at all stages of their lives. The content of learning, the way learning is accessed, and where it takes place may vary depending on the learner and their learning requirements.

Lifelong learning is also about providing "second chances" to update basic skills and also offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to become much more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can truly be tailored to the needs of the learner, or indeed the potential learner.

Strategy for Lifelong Learning in the Federal Republic of Germany

The purpose of the German strategy paper on lifelong learning is to describe how all citizens can be encouraged to participate in learning during all phases of their lives and in all spheres of life, at different learning sites and through many different types of learning (Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion Secretariat, 5-8). Lifelong learning includes all forms of learning –whether formal, non-formal or informal. "Learning" is understood to mean the constructive conversion of information and experience into knowledge, insights and skills.

Pursuant to Germany's constitutional framework, the strategy for lifelong learning in the Federal Republic of Germany cannot be described as a "coherent national strategy", but as a jointly agreed strategy for lifelong learning which identifies the aspects and contexts on which there is a broad consensus between the different *Länder* as well as between the Federal Government and the *Länder* irrespective of their responsibilities.

The strategy has been devised to match not only the **life phases** of the individual from early childhood to old age but also essential aspects of lifelong learning, which constitute **development focuses**. Within this framework, realistic and sustainable perspectives are being developed which are based on existing educational structures, activities and experience and which define a structured framework for lifelong learning that is flexible and open to the necessary continuous process of further development. The development focuses of this strategy are:

- **Inclusion of informal learning**
- **Self-directed learning**
- **Development of skills**
- **Networking**
- **Modularisation**
- **Learning guidance**
- **New learning culture/popularisation of learning**
- **Fair access.**

The chapters of the Strategy paper dealing with **children, adolescents, young adults, adults** and the **elderly** show the relevance of the development focuses to the different phases of life and reveal how these focuses are part of the lifelong learning strategy. At the same time, the combination of **life phases** and **development focuses** seeks to counteract the separation of the individual educational sectors.

During "**childhood**" learning greatly influences access to education and thus the individual's chances of success in life. This is the period in which the foundations for lifelong learning are laid. The motivation and ability to learn are aroused and encouraged; children's abilities are enhanced and they are supported to develop an independent personality. The target groups include not only the children themselves, but also their parents, other central figures and teachers at day-care centres as well as teachers at

primary school. Essential elements during this phase of life include the scope and quality of **informal learning**, the **development of skills** on the basis of new educational plans, the **networking** of kindergartens, schools, parents, child and youth service institutions, as well as **learning guidance** particularly for parents.

During "**adolescence**" most learning processes take place in school. Learning during this phase of life is characterized by educational programmes organized by others and by the obligation to learn. The **development of skills** is particularly important; this means that schools impart basic skills such as learning and action skills, social and personal skills as well as the ability to work in a team in addition to subject knowledge. Attainment targets and final qualifications will be comparable, e.g. by the introduction of educational standards. It is also very important to foster the ability of adolescents to organize their own learning and to make them practise independent learning (**self-directed learning**). Furthermore, mention has to be made of **learning guidance**, which is to help overcome learning problems and to provide orientation to schools and career guidance services, and of the development of a new **learning culture** that gives schools more scope for their own decision-making and for developing their own profile. **Fair access** is ensured by means of a wide range of supporting measures.

During the next phase of life, which begins when "**young adults**" enter the world of work or start their initial vocational training and which ends when they take up regular employment, the following focuses are of major importance: the inclusion of **informal learning**, **self-directed learning**, the **development of** (social, professional, cultural and personal) **skills** and the documentation of informally acquired skills. **Networking** takes place mainly between schools, companies, higher education institutions, associations, job centres and institutions of continuing education. By **modularizing** educational content, individuals are enabled to enhance their skills systematically, and **fair access** is improved. **Learning guidance** with respect to questions of vocational training, academic studies and continuing education or training plays an important role. In this phase, the main features of **the new learning culture** are relevance to practical work and orientation towards transferability. It is important to help young adults understand that entry into the world of work does not put an end to learning but means transferring to another stage of learning. "**Adult life**" is a phase which is increasingly determined by change, and for some by breaks and interruptions – a fact which clearly demonstrates the need for lifelong learning. Because of their strong involvement in professional life and family life time is very scarce for adults. Therefore, the possibility to structure their own learning (**self-directed learning**) is very important for them. The skills acquired through **informal learning** in the family, on the job and through leisure activities become employable qualifications through documentation and recognition. The **modularization** of learning content makes it possible to gradually build up individual competency profiles. Personal, social and occupational **skills** can be further developed in courses offered for continuing general, vocational and political education.

The term "the **elderly**" is defined as including mostly adults who will soon enter retirement or are already retired. Formal learning becomes less important; learners have greater freedom to decide for themselves whether, how and for what purpose they should take part in learning activities (**self-directed learning**). Achieving or retaining independence and autonomy even at an advanced age is one major goal of lifelong learning during this phase of life. With regard to the **development of competencies**, it is obvious that preserving skills and abilities is more important than developing new ones. The learning activities of the elderly also have a compensatory function, in particular for

the last years of occupational life, for retirement and in order to make up for deficits. At the same time, older people also acquire new skills in order to pass on their experience and knowledge or to do voluntary work. The removal of age-specific obstacles in existing educational programmes is a prerequisite for **fair access** to lifelong learning also for the elderly.

It remains a task for all the responsible players in the *Länder* and in the Federal Government to apply the framework defined in the German strategy paper in accordance with their respective educational priorities. The adoption of the report in the Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion shows that those responsible are willing to actively promote the further development of education in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Strategy for Lifelong Learning in ZIP- „Zukuntorientierte Personalentwicklungsstrategien“ – German Equal Project, Stuttgart

Our ZIP (EQUAL) projects are elaborated for different phases in life with a special focus on migrants. Our activities comprise the following development focuses

- **Inclusion of informal learning**
- **Self-directed learning**
- **Development of skills**
- **Networking**
- **Learning guidance**
- **New learning culture/popularisation of learning**
- **Fair access.**

The aim of our project ZIP is the development and implementation of a Cultural Audit procedure for SME's and public institutions in Baden-Württemberg (in Southern Germany). The Cultural Audit is a tool to reflect and improve intercultural learning processes in enterprises and organisations. The participating enterprises will not only demonstrate social responsibility but enhance an effective working/learning environment. Cultural diversity is considered as an important human resource within a global economic market.

Literature:

- Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion Secretariat: Strategy for Lifelong Learning in the Federal Republic of Germany. Bonn 2004.
- Communication from the Commission: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality. Bruxelles 2001.