

Updated position of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research on the next generation of the EU education programmes 2014-2020

The EU education programmes have been one of the EU's visiting cards since the late 1980s. Cross-border learner mobility and cooperation have been open to ever larger sectors of the population in recent years, and have promoted personal development, the acquisition of qualifications and skills, and a strong sense of belonging to Europe. These programmes have also made an important contribution towards increasing the quality of education systems in Europe and towards the internationalisation of institutions of education.

The EU education programmes include the Lifelong Learning Programme, ERASMUS MUNDUS, TEMPUS, ALFA, EDULINK, the bilateral programmes with the USA and Canada and other small third-country programmes.

The Lifelong Learning programme has covered all sectors of education and age groups since 2007. The orientation of the programme towards specific target groups has been a key factor in its success.

The significant role of education is reflected in the EU 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth via its link with the main objectives.

Without major investments in human capital, it will not be possible to realise the core objectives in the EU 2020 Strategy with regard to the expansion of the tertiary education sector and the reduction of the school drop-out rate¹. Especially in times of low economic activity, the education offensive in the interests of lifelong learning must therefore be continued on a broad basis in order to ensure long-term economic and social development. Austria welcomes the proposal of the European Commission to increase the education budget to EUR 15.2bn. The EU education programmes have a European added value from a social and economic perspective. They should therefore – building on previous good experiences – be continued and extended. The content and structure of the programmes need to be adapted to current circumstances and optimised.

With this updated position, Austria wishes to make a constructive contribution to the preparation and discussion of the new programme generation, so that the success of the programme is continued.

a) Budget

Austria welcomes the proposed increase in the budget for the new EU education programme, as without investments the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy and the ET 2020 educational policy framework cannot be achieved. From an economic perspective, investments in education provide high returns.

In its study 'High costs of low educational performance', the OECD clearly shows that countries which have greater human resources exhibit greater increases in productivity. The higher the level of qualifications of those in employment, the easier

¹Cf. A Budget for Europe 2020, COM(2011) 500 final version

it is for technological transformation and the related social and economic development to take place. Higher levels of education also have a positive effect on the costs of the health care system and public safety.

Increasing education levels is a key area of the 2020 Strategy and has a decisive effect on the achievement of the core objectives and on the implementation of the flagship initiatives 'Youth on the move', 'An agenda for new skills and jobs' and the 'European platform against poverty and social inclusion'.

In order to achieve the objectives and implement the flagship initiatives, sufficient financing is required. However, it must be ensured that budget increases are not achieved by the amalgamation of programmes or annual progressive increases. In addition, the relationship in terms of content and finances between the individual sectors of education must be ensured in an appropriate way.

b) Programme architecture

The three proposed focuses of the new programme – mobility, institutional cooperation and internationalisation, and policy development – appear meaningful. For an effective implementation, however, it is necessary to maintain the target group orientation within these three horizontal focuses, and to take the needs of different levels of education into account. Orientation towards the target groups is also essential as a criterion for the distribution of funding within the programme.

As part of the interim evaluation of the Lifelong Learning programme, it was established that "The Lifelong Learning Programme is responsive to the needs of the target groups - mainly the education and training community. Evidence shows that in the 2007-2009 period the Programme was successful in reaching staff and learners in formal education and training as well as meeting most of their needs with regard to the quality of learning, the acquisition, recognition and validation of skills and competences, personal development, language learning and social skills."²

The Lifelong Learning programme was introduced and publicised with a high deployment of resources on the part of the Member States and the Commission. The interim evaluation of the Commission attests to the success of the integration of the programme in the period 2007-2009³. We welcome the optimisation of the structure of the current Lifelong Learning programme, the reduction of the targets and the integration of the third country programmes – and thus the strengthening of the international dimension. This makes it possible to concentrate on the common education policy objectives.

These education policy objectives of the EU 2020 and ET 2020 strategies are largely orientated towards individual sectors of education and target groups. In order to implement these strategies in the best way possible, the future programme has to continue to take all sectors of education and target groups into account. Austria considers the retention of the sub-programmes within the three pillars to be

²Cf. Interim Evaluation, Executive Summary

³Cf. Executive Summary

meaningful in the interests of further increasing efficiency and the greatest possible level of user-friendliness.

At the same time, it is advantageous to retain the well-known programme names of Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Grundtvig, Erasmus Mundus, Jean Monnet etc., as they guarantee high visibility and identification levels. For example, not to use the name Erasmus Mundus would lead to a loss of visibility of the EU education programmes and of the European Union itself in the world.

Integration of the EU third-country programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, EU-USA etc.) into the structure of an 'Education Europe' programme:

The EU programmes Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, EU-USA etc., increase the attractiveness of European higher education via concentrated cooperation with third countries, and support the development of excellence. They also contribute towards the development of the international higher education sector, particularly within the framework of the Bologna Process.

The success of the integration of these programmes into 'Education Europe' depends on the planned rules for the handling of the partnerships and cooperations as well as the mobility structure and the related mobility grants. The different target groups and programme structures therefore need to be taken into consideration in an appropriate way.

The **EU programme Youth in Action** promotes social participation, intercultural competence and non-formal learning. Youth in Action plays a key role in the strategic goals of the EU 2020 strategy, particularly for the achievement of the core objective of education/reducing the school drop-out rate. This programme reaches disadvantaged young people outside the schools sector. This is an important target group which has to be addressed in an even better way in the future in order to counteract early school leaving and social exclusion early and effectively. Austria therefore advocates that in the next generation of programmes, the youth sector be retained under the umbrella of 'Education Europe' as an independent sector of equal value with a clearly defined target group.

In the Commission Staff Working Document (SEC (2011) 868 final), a mixture of Option 3 (refocused programmes) and Option 4 (single programme integrating the current programmes in education, training and youth, including international cooperation in higher education) is given as the preferred option. The statements made in the Communication, however, refer almost exclusively to Option 4. From an Austrian perspective, a greater emphasis on Option 3 would be desirable for the further development of the programme.

c) Contents / goals:

'Education Europe' should support European goals in education policy. In the new education programme, the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy and the goals of Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) thus have to be taken into consideration at all levels of the education system. In particular, a greater focus has to be placed on the quality and attractiveness of vocational education in order to reach the EU 2020 objectives.

Since 2007, the EU education programme Lifelong Learning has covered all sectors of education. Alongside higher and vocational education, the future programme therefore also has to attach an appropriate level of importance to the areas of school education, adult education and informal education, which are hardly mentioned in the Communication 'A Budget for Europe 2020'.

The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué signed by the Ministers for Higher Education within the Bologna Process states that in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad.

Austria welcomes the focus on mobility. With a view to mobility for crossborder learning or teaching experience quality assurance should have the highest priority. Raising the quantitative aspect of mobility **as envisaged in the MFF** only makes sense together with quality criteria that take into account the needs of different target groups and educational levels. We therefore need a target group specific approach. However, we must not overlook that learning mobility can also lead to unbalanced student flows in Europe. This could lead to a reduction in quality of education and training and could have negative consequences for the labor market.

From the Austrian point of view, "Education Europe" needs to take into account the three cycle Bologna System. The new framework calls for an overhaul and modernisation of ERASMUS mobility. For example, a "mobility account" could assure higher flexibility of mobility. In this respect, Austria welcomes the idea of "Master mobility" proposed in the MFF.

The main objectives of the future programme listed in the Communication are of key importance – combating youth unemployment and improving skills in line with the needs of the labour market. However, in view of the increasing demands made on employees by the labour market, achieving the employability of young people cannot succeed without a higher level of performance on the part of the education system. The effects of the programme on the individual elements of the education system must therefore be further improved.

In order to realise this, a broader definition of the aspect of employability is necessary for the future. Alongside the improvement of individual skills and personal development, employability must also place more emphasis on the quality of the education system – particularly the quality and attractiveness of vocational education.

These are key education policy objectives within the framework of the Copenhagen Process.⁴

d) Simplification of administration:

In the interests of efficiency, economy and customer-friendliness, simplifying administration is a major concern for Austria. This can only be achieved when existing, proven administrative processes are used as a basis which is then further developed and improved. In addition, any kind of multiple controls must be avoided in the interests of the cost-benefit ratio.

Austria welcomes the Commission's wish to simplify the administration of the programme and to reduce the targets and priorities. Combining or breaking up structures does not, however, automatically lead to simplification.

The following factors are of much greater significance: the simplification of processes and contracts, the clear distribution of tasks and responsibility between the Commission, national authorities and the national agencies, and increasing the efficiency of control mechanisms (e.g. the reduction of multiple controls carried out by different monitoring bodies).

Successful administrative mechanisms were developed in the current generation of programmes (e.g. LLP Link). They were introduced by the national agencies, the national authorities and the European Commission with a high deployment of both personnel and funding. The interim evaluation of the Commission confirms that they now function well after initial difficulties, and that stability is required in the management system in order to capitalise "on many improvements that are still to show their positive effects"⁵.

In the interests of further increases in impact and efficiency, Austria advocates the retention and simplification of the existing administration and management processes, and a continuation of decentralisation. Experience shows that the introduction of new processes takes several years, so that stable programme management could only be expected in the middle of the duration of the new programme. This would lead to additional administration costs and an intensive use of resources for all those involved.

e) Interaction with other programmes:

The transnational orientation of the current education programmes and the good interaction based on the joint goals and priorities of the Member States and the Commission are important strengths of the programme which create added value for society and education policy.

The Communication 'A Budget for Europe 2020' confirms the success of the current education programmes and their effects on education systems. The fragmentation of the programme is criticised, which prevents it from reaching a critical mass. The Communication emphasises the need for streamlining and greater synergies between the EU education programmes and other EU programmes, particularly the

⁴Cf. Bruges Communiqué, Nov. 2010

⁵Cf. Interim Evaluation of the COM, Executive Summary

ESF. The possible shifting of actions to other programmes is viewed critically by Austria.

From an Austrian perspective, the target-group oriented pillar structure is one of the factors which makes the programme successful. The current fragmentation can be counteracted by increased focusing of the programme and the reduction of the targets.

The bottom-up approach which is present in many areas of the LLP creates added value for the education system and for individual education institutions: it strengthens the commitment and initiative of individual persons and institutions, it creates a feeling of ownership, it promotes internationalisation and the sense of belonging to Europe, and brings innovations which occur within projects into the system. This distinguishes the LLP significantly from other programmes which follow a more top-down approach. Austria therefore views the interaction of the programmes as complementary and not as overlapping. Moreover, the transnational orientation of the LLP is also a clear added value for society and the economy in Europe.