Key competences for lifelong learning

Key competences in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. They provide added value for the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation. Because they should be acquired by everyone, this Recommendation proposes a reference tool for the Member States to ensure that these key competences are fully integrated into their strategies and infrastructures, particularly in the context of lifelong learning.

ACT

SUMMARY

Key competences for lifelong learning

Key competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.

Key competences are essential in a knowledge society and guarantee more flexibility in the labour force, allowing it to adapt more quickly to constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world.

They are also a major factor in innovation, productivity and competitiveness, and they contribute to the motivation and satisfaction of workers and the quality of work.

Key competences should be acquired by:

- young people at the end of their compulsory education and training equipping them for adult life, particularly for working life, whilst forming a basis for further learning;
- adults throughout their lives through a process of developing and updating skills.

The acquisition of key competences fits in with the principles of equality and access for all. This reference framework also applies in particular to disadvantaged groups whose educational potential requires support. Examples of such groups include people with low basic skills, early school leavers, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities or migrants, etc.

Eight key competences

This framework defines eight key competences and describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each of these. These key competences are:

- **communication in the mother tongue** which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact...
linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;

- **communication in foreign languages** which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding. The level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;

- **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology.** Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with the emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge. Basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies which explain the natural world. These involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen;

- **digital competence** involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT);

- **learning to learn** is related to learning, the ability to pursue and organise one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities;

- **social and civic competences.** Social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. It is linked to personal and social well-being. An understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential. Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights) equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation;

- **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. The individual is aware of the context of their work and is able to seize opportunities which arise. It is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance;

- **cultural awareness and expression** which involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts).

These key competences are all interdependent, and the emphasis in each case is on critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and constructive management of feelings.

### A European reference framework for the Member States and the Commission

These key competences provide a reference framework to support national and European efforts to achieve the objectives they define. This framework is mainly intended for policy makers, education and training providers, employers and learners.

It is a reference tool for the Member States and their education and training policies. The Member States should try to ensure:

- that initial education and training offer all young people the means to develop the key competences to a level that equips them for adult and working life, thus also providing a basis for future learning;
- that appropriate provision is made for young people who are disadvantaged in their training so that they can fulfil their educational potential;
- that adults can develop and update key competences throughout their lives, particularly priority target groups such as persons who need to update their competences;
- that appropriate infrastructure is in place for continuing education and training of adults, that there are measures to ensure access to education and training and the labour market, and that there is support for learners depending on their specific needs and competences;
the coherence of adult education and training provision through close links between the policies concerned.

It forms the basis for action at Community level, particularly within the Education and Training 2010 work programme and more generally within the Community education and training programmes. In this respect, the Commission should make a special effort to:

- help the Member States to develop their education and training systems, apply the reference framework so as to facilitate peer learning and the exchange of good practices, and follow up developments and report on progress through the progress reports on the Education and Training 2010 work programme;
- use the reference framework for the implementation of the Community education and training programmes whilst ensuring that these programmes promote the acquisition of key competences;
- use the reference framework to implement related Community policies (employment, youth, cultural and social policies) and to strengthen links with social partners and other organisations active in those fields;
- assess, by December 2010, the impact of the reference framework within the context of the Education and Training 2010 work programme as well as the experience gained and the implications for the future.

Context

The transversal nature of key competences makes them essential. They provide value added for employment, social cohesion or young people (European Youth Pact), which explains the importance of lifelong learning in terms of adapting to change and integration. The reference criteria which make it possible to judge improvements in European performances featured in a 2005 report with contrasting results.

In response to the concerns expressed at the Lisbon European Council on 23 and 24 March 2000, which were repeated in the revised Lisbon strategy in 2005, the key competences form part of the objectives of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, the Commission Communication of 2001 on making a European area of lifelong learning a reality, and the subsequent Council resolution adopted in 2002. These last two put forward specific proposals on making key competences a priority for all age groups. For its part, the 2004 Joint Interim report on the progress of the Education and Training 2010 work programme made the case for drawing up common European references and principles.

RELATED ACTS


"Education and Training 2010" The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms - Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe [Official Journal C 104 of 30 April 2004].


Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe [Official Journal C 142 of 14 June 2002].


Last updated: 2.3.2007