



European
Association
of Regional
and Local
Authorities
for Lifelong
Learning

EU POLICY UPDATE October 2009

Summary

Brussels is currently playing a waiting game to see who will be in President Barroso's new team and what the new Commission's priorities will be. Breaths are baited as well to see how the Irish vote in their referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon. The new Parliament is also settling into its work with all posts now allocated and MEPs gearing themselves up to question the new Commission. Otherwise the churn of policies and initiatives continues apace with a lot of debate on the shape of the "Lisbon" strategy to 2020, the launch of the mobility consultation and a new scheme to promote early language learning as well as work on teachers, the knowledge triangle and on refreshing the EU's youth strategy.

Institutional news

Barroso re-elected as Commission chief

With Barroso comfortably elected as new Commission chief for a second term by MEPs in mid September (382 votes in favour, 219 against and 117 abstentions) attention is now turning to his team. No decision has yet been made on national nominations for other posts in the new group (college) of European Commissioners, though Brussels is awash with rumour. The decision however is likely to await the result of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty on 2 October.

There is also no decision as yet on the timing of European Parliament committee hearings for those prospective Commissioners-designate. These hearings are an opportunity for MEPs to question the prospective Commissioners and EARLALL may like to consider whether to suggest questions for relevant MEPs.

Setting out his "manifesto" to MEPs in Strasbourg, Barroso stressed the need for "an integrated vision for a coherent 'EU 2020' strategy" bringing together the economic, social and environmental strands. He continued that "we cannot and must not return to the previous growth model: it has clearly proved unsustainable".

Posts in new European Parliament allocated

By now all posts in the European Parliament have been allocated with the institution now led by Polish MEP, Jerry Buzek from the right of centre European People's Party (EPP). The committee which deals with educational issues is now chaired by the very experienced and energetic MEP Doris Pack from Germany, which is good news. A full list of MEPs in positions of most relevance to EARLALL members is annexed to this update.

Committee of the Regions members discuss future of Lisbon

CoR members in the organisation's economic and social committee (ECOS) have strongly supported the paper on the future of Lisbon drafted by National Assembly for Wales member Christine Chapman. Meeting in Poland last month members backed her call for the Lisbon strategy to merged with the Sustainable development strategy. The report also proposes that the strategy should be renamed to avoid confusion with the Treaty of Lisbon and that it should be given the objective of promoting a "high quality of life and well-being for all EU citizens", a goal to be achieved within "the ecological limits set by a finite planet". In the paper she argues that the "ecological limit" is the overarching priority which defines the boundaries within which our social and economic policies must operate. Conceptually this is a really significant shift – and while President Barroso advocates integrating the Lisbon and Sustainable Development strategy, he (or indeed few, if any, of the MS) are thinking in these terms yet. Consequently there must be investment in the green economy and the development of an EU green skills and green jobs strategy. Finally the paper also emphasises the need to tackle poverty and growing wealth inequalities – noting that 2010 will be the European Year for combating Poverty and Social Exclusion – and states that it should further recognise the role played by local and regional authorities. The paper will go to the CoR plenary for adoption on 2-3 December.

Education, skills and employment brief

Mobility consultation launched

In July the European Commission launched its consultation on promoting the learning mobility of young people with a deadline for response of 15 December. Details of this consultation paper are in the draft EARLALL response being presented for discussion at the Gothenburg General Assembly. It is anticipated that Spain will take forward work on this issue when it assumes the EU Presidency at the beginning of next year.

Teachers key to successful schools

EU Education Ministers discussed the future of the teaching profession at their informal Council in Gothenburg on 23-24 September. Topics included: status (attracting and retaining the best), initial and in-service training, school leadership (the role of the principal and his/her relationship with teachers) and conditions of work. Speaking just before the meeting, Swedish Education Minister Jan Björklund said that "We are facing major problems in Europe when it comes to our school systems. Results have been falling for a long time and schools must improve. Therefore we will be focusing on the question of the provision of teachers, on how we can get bright pupils to want to become teachers in the future".

To inform debate, the Swedish Presidency circulated a memo which covers all the issues and has useful references to recent EU level work in this field (Commission Communications, results from the EU education and training 2010, OECD survey "Teachers matter" that recommends competence profiles for teachers etc). This paper also makes the point that the EU Lifelong Learning Programme should do more with regard to teacher development. The results of this meeting will feed into a policy position that EU Ministers will adopt at the 26-27 November education Council.

Strengthening the knowledge triangle (education, research, innovation)

Developing the role of education as part of the knowledge triangle will also be discussed by EU Education Ministers in November who will argue that there is a need for systemic and continuous interaction between the points of the triangle and for the bridging of cultural gaps.

Some of the suggested priorities for action that Ministers are likely to make in their policy position include:

- The need for more coherent policy-making at both European and national level between the three components of the triangle (to be monitored via the Open Method of Coordination)

- to develop curricula to foster entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and to promote an “innovation culture” at universities whereby for example increased recognition is given to academics for initiating such cooperation
- enhanced partnerships between universities and business (with emphasis on mobility)
- greater incentives for universities to develop knowledge that can be transferred to the wider economy and removal of any barriers that may exist
- the need to disseminate the results of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and its Knowledge and Innovation Communities, the first of which will be selected in January 2010, as examples of good practice
- EU funding, notably from the structural funds, for projects linked to the development of education as the basis of the knowledge triangle

This debate is one aspect of the wider modernisation of higher education agenda and is also one of the priority themes in the European Higher Education or Bologna process which held its last Ministerial in Belgium this April.

Migrants and education

Following the Commission's consultation on migration and education and its subsequent report on the contributions received, the Council now turns its attention to this topic. Recognising that children from migrant backgrounds often under-perform educationally, Member States, regional and local governments are invited to take action to try and resolve this problem. Discussions to date have focused on the need to develop anti-discrimination mechanisms, to ensure more personalised learning and to develop strategies for teaching the host country language and where possible to help migrant pupils maintain their mother tongue. Subject to Ministerial agreement at the November Council, the Commission will monitor the achievement gap between migrant pupils and those from non-migrant backgrounds. More generally, EU funding should support projects aimed at improving achievement levels among migrant pupils and there is a need for further EU level policy work on this topic.

EU employment committee monitors future and eskills

Skills will now figure in the monitoring of the EU's Employment Guidelines after the Employment Committee, commonly known as EMCO and composed of representatives of Member States and the social partners decided to add 'Future skills needs (expansion, replacement and total demand)' and 'E-skills of adults' to its list of indicators. EMCO encourages the Member States to use these indicators in their Lisbon National Reform Programmes.

Piccolongo – new Commission initiative to promote early language learning

Speaking at a conference in Brussels on 24 September to launch Piccolongo Leonard Orban, the EU Commissioner for Multilingualism said: “The aim of Piccolongo is to convince as many parents as possible about the benefits of early language learning and give them practical advice.” Orban added: “Learning foreign languages at an early age does not just provide children with advantages for their future careers; it also makes them more open to and interested in other cultures.”

This conference covered state of the art of research on the benefits and challenges of language acquisition in early childhood (between two and six), existing good practice in early language learning and language learners with special needs.

Plans for refreshed EU Youth strategy to 2020

As with education, proposals are now on the table for a refreshed EU strategy on youth which will govern the open method of coordination on youth for the next ten years. Some of the key points in the draft proposals are:

- To continue twin track youth specific and mainstreaming approach as at present
- To work on seven fields of action (education, employment, health, participation and volunteering, social inclusion, youth and the world, creativity/culture) with Member States to choose priority areas for cooperation during three year work cycles (the first to run to 2012)
- Working methods to include mutual learning, knowledge gathering (e.g. through the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy), progress reporting and monitoring, and the development of dialogue with young people and their organisations

Youth Ministers will adopt a resolution on this strategy at the November Youth Council.

In brief

- The Commission will shortly circulate a survey on the role of promoting creativity in classrooms. The initial results will be available at the end of the year, in time for the closing conference of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.
- The Employment Committee recently published a report on monitoring flexicurity policies available here: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=591&furtherNews=yes>
- Two new Eurydice studies have just been launched: *Key data on education in Europe 2009* and on *National Testing of Pupils in Europe: Objectives, Organisation and Use of Results*, with the latter concluding that there is more testing now than was previously the case
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/109EN.pdf
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/105EN.pdf
- Ireland is first country to link its national qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland: Ireland and the EQF:
http://www.nqai.ie/interdev_eqf.html
<http://www.nqai.ie/documents/EQFReferencingReportfinalJune2009.pdf>
- The Commission's employment directorate has just published a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the automotive sector in Europe. For report see:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=585&furtherNews=yes>
- Cedefop is currently undertaking a project on financing vocational education and training (looking at tax incentives, cost sharing etc) with initial findings to be released this autumn.
- A new platform on languages and business held its first meeting in Brussels on 22 September with the aim of exchanging best practice on the importance of language skills for the labour market and on the development of languages within companies. Members are from European networks representing SMEs, chambers of commerce etc

Key MEPs for EARLALL

Post	MEP	Party (nationality)
Education and Culture Committee		
Chair	Doris Pack	European People's Party (Germany)
1 st Vice chair	Helga Trupel	Greens-European Free Alliance (Germany)
Vice-Chair	Timo Soino	European Freedom and Democracy Group (Finland)
Vice-Chair	Lothar Bisky	Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (Germany)
Vice Chair	Morten Løkkegaard	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (Denmark)
Coordinator	Marco Scurria	EPP (Italy)
Coordinator	Mary Honeyball	Progressive alliance of Socialists and democrats (UK)
Coordinator	Hannu Takkula	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (Finland)
Coordinator	Malika Benarab Attou malika.benarab-attou@europarl.europa.eu	Greens-European Free Alliance (France)
Employment and social affairs committee		
Chair	Pervenche Beres	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and democrats (France)
1 st Vice chair	Elizabeth Lynne	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (UK)
Vice-Chair	Ilda Figueirido	Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (Portugal)
Vice-Chair	Elisabeth Schroedter	Greens/European Free Alliance (Germany)
Vice Chair	Thomas Mann	EPP (Germany)
Coordinator	Csaba Öry	EPP (Hungary)
Coordinator	Alejandro Cercas	Progressive alliance of Socialists and democrats (Spain)
Coordinator	Marian Harkin	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (France)
Coordinator	Jean Lambert	Greens-European Free Alliance (UK)