**COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 15 May 2009**

**9876/09**

**EDUC 90**
**SOC 329**
**COMPET 273**

**OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS**

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| of : | COUNCIL |
| date: | 12 May 2009 |
| No. prev. doc. : | 8986/09 EDUC 70 SOC 269 COMPET 226 |
| Subject : | Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 12 May 2009 on enhancing partnerships between education and training institutions and social partners, in particular employers, in the context of lifelong learning |

Delegations will find attached the text of the above conclusions, as adopted at the Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting on 11-12 May 2009.

# ANNEX

**Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 12 May 2009 on enhancing partnerships between education and training institutions and social partners, in particular employers, in the context of lifelong learning**

The Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council,

HAVING REGARD TO

1. The political background to these issues as set out in the Annex of these Conclusions, and the results of the conference on the support of partnerships between education and training institutions and employers held on 6-7 April 2009 in Prague.

2. The difficult global economic climate which, in addition to the current problems of the financial system and the recent economic downturn, presents Europe with the fundamental challenge of developing its economic prosperity in a cohesive and stable social environment against the background of unfavourable demographic development, rapidly changing information and communication technologies and the imperative need to protect the environment.

AWARE THAT

1. Education has intrinsic value and is key to enabling individuals to realise their full potential and achieve personal fulfilment in all aspects of their lives. It plays a crucial role in their intellectual, moral, social, creative and physical development and, by promoting essential social and civic values such as equality, tolerance, respect and active citizenship, it makes a significant contribution to strengthening social cohesion.
2. Whilst acknowledging the wide range of roles which education and training fulfil, an important part of education's role in fostering social cohesion lies in its ability to equip people with the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes needed to enter and remain in the labour market. Integration into the world of work gives individuals an opportunity to have a full stake in society, thus contributing to their social inclusion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment.

3. In terms of enhancing employability, the capacity of Europe's education and training systems to ensure a supply of highly qualified people mastering the requirements of today's working world and contributing to innovation both as employees and entrepreneurs will be decisive, if Europe is to maintain and improve its competitive position in the global economy.

CONSIDER THEREFORE THAT

1. As the labour market is increasingly characterised by rapid changes, employers have an important role to play in identifying the knowledge, skills and competences needed in working life. To increase the employability and entrepreneurial potential of all learners, communication and active cooperation should be further developed between education and training institutions on the one hand and employers on the other. It is important that employers from all sectors - private, public and voluntary - are involved in this process.
   In this way, employers' knowledge and experience could be used, in the course of the lifelong learning process, to help each individual to acquire the knowledge, skills, competences and positive attitude towards work which will support his or her chances of finding a suitable job or starting his or her own business. Equally, this will increase employers' chances of finding suitably skilled employees and keeping the skills of their employees up to date.

2. The competitiveness and growth of Europe's economy could also be improved by putting the knowledge triangle to work, notably by developing partnerships between employers and education and research institutions which are aimed at fostering innovation and ensuring its transfer into practice.

EMPHASISE THAT

1. While some levels of education and training may lend themselves to the kind of initiatives outlined in these conclusions more than others, education and training institutions at all levels – from schools through to vocational, adult and higher education institutions – should, to the appropriate extent, seek greater openness and responsiveness to the wider world and actively communicate with other partners in society at large.

2. Existing national models for the consultation of all relevant stakeholders and social partners are very valuable to the ongoing development of education in its role to prepare our citizens for the challenges of life in the 21st century. Whilst fully recognising this, it should also be emphasised that partnerships between education and training institutions and employers have a particular role to play in enhancing learners' employability, entrepreneurial potential and familiarity with the working world.

3. Partnerships based on trust and dialogue can offer mutual benefits for all those involved. On the one side, greater awareness of trends in the labour market can help to make learning more responsive to future needs and increase student motivation by providing a clear context for learning. On the other side, collaboration with education and training institutions may help to maintain or foster greater awareness of cultural, ethical, social and environmental issues within the business world. More concretely, such collaboration can also help employers to carry out the increasingly essential task of updating skills and ensuring the professional development of their staff.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES to

1. Consider the needs of society and the labour market, taking into account both the existing situation in local, regional, national and European labour markets and any expected changes to these, when developing and implementing education and training policy.

2. Actively encourage the development of platforms for mutual dialogue between education and training institutions and employers and other relevant stakeholders at national and regional level, as well as - where appropriate - of processes through which the governance and management of vocational education and training (VET) or tertiary education institutions are able to benefit from the valuable input that employers and other relevant stakeholders can give. The objectives of such cooperation should be to promote a situation in which:

   a) the provision of education and training courses at VET, higher education and adult education level takes into consideration the needs of the labour market, while greater account is taken of the relevance of study programmes to the labour market within quality assurance systems for education;

   b) theoretical educational content is complemented as far as possible with a practical component adapted to the needs of the labour market, while more account could be taken of employers' and other relevant stakeholders' views when defining learning outcomes and, where appropriate, curriculum or course contents;

   c) sufficient attention is paid in education and training institutions at all levels to the potential offered by new pedagogical tools and technologies, as well as to the acquisition of transversal key competences useful in professional life, such as communication and organisational skills, the ability to work with others, problem solving, risk assessment and decision taking.

d) individuals acquire the experience, skills, competences and attitudes needed to embrace change as an opportunity and to remain both receptive to and capable of producing new ideas in a culturally diverse, knowledge-based society, while a favourable climate is created at all levels of learning for the development of a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;

e) high quality lifelong guidance, information and support are provided, these being especially crucial at the time when educational or professional career choices are made.

3. Tackle any unjustified barriers that may exist to the development of such partnerships, whether these be found in legislation, administrative rules, incentive and assessment systems and practices, particularly in promoting various forms of mobility between education and training institutions and work places. More specifically:

a) employers and professionals should be encouraged to contribute actively to both the development and delivery of education and training programmes aimed at preparing people for working life;

b) both students and teaching staff should have opportunities for workplace visits, placements and cooperation of various kinds, involving employers in all sectors and covering a whole range of different working environments;

c) direct experience of the workplace of this kind should be available not only locally or nationally but also abroad. Mobility which involves practical experience abroad contributes to the development not only of professional competences but also of foreign language skills and communicative, social and intercultural competences.

4. Consider, whilst fully respecting Member States' legislation and practices, the creation of incentives aimed at encouraging employers and other relevant stakeholders to provide professional, financial or material support for education and training institutions or direct support for learners, particularly in areas where there is a shortfall of appropriately skilled individuals. In this respect, the development of partnerships with education and training institutions could fall within the framework of company strategies in the field of corporate social responsibility.

5. Promote close cooperation with employers and other relevant stakeholders at the systemic level, especially with regard to :

   a) the recognition of learning outcomes in formal, non-formal and informal learning environments and the development of qualification frameworks;

   b) the development and improvement of economic and labour market forecasts, which focus particularly on trends in skills and human resources requirements at national and regional level;

   c) the implementation of common European tools (especially the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, the European Qualifications Framework, common principles for the recognition of prior learning, credit systems and quality assurance tools), and the implementation of national lifelong learning strategies;

   d) the development of target-specific models of cooperation between adult education and training institutions and employers aimed at helping the low-skilled into sustainable employment through lifelong learning.

6. Consider the use of financial resources from the structural funds, in accordance with national priorities, for the support of partnerships between education and training institutions and employers.

INVITE THE COMMISSION to

1. Further develop the University-Business Forum as a physical and virtual platform at European level for dialogue between the different stakeholders, to envisage its extension to include other levels of education and training, stakeholders from countries outside the EU and specific sectors within higher education, to disseminate the findings of the platforms and to facilitate access to and the sharing of examples of good practice.

2. Facilitate cross-border links between any national and/or regional platforms that might be established for the purpose of better cooperation between education and training institutions and employers, in order to create synergies and encourage the exchange of good practice and mutual learning.

3. Ensure, under the Lifelong Learning Programme, that :

   a) where appropriate, the priorities of individual programmes help to develop all kinds of partnership between education and training institutions and employers, so that education and training in the Member States become more responsive to labour market needs;

   b) any proposals for changes to the Programme, particularly with a view to its revision in 2013, take into account the objective of encouraging and reinforcing partnerships between education and training institutions and employers, and increasing the numbers of work placements and apprenticeships;

   c) through targeted information campaigns, awareness is increased among all stakeholders – employers, education and training institutions and the learners themselves – of the opportunities which exist for mobility, in particular in the field of work placements and apprenticeships.

4. With a view to increasing both the quantity and quality of VET learners' mobility across Europe, support initiatives aimed at establishing partnerships for the purpose of identifying and overcoming the main obstacles to the mobility of apprentices and young people in initial VET.

5. Focus, via the open method of coordination, on the exchange of information and good practice in the field of partnerships between education and training institutions and employers, and disseminate the outcomes to relevant stakeholders and the wider public.

6. Improve the anticipation of labour market and skills needs, notably through the expertise of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in conducting economic and labour market development forecasts, as well as in making projections for skills and competence requirements for the European labour market, and in this context implement other relevant recommendations of the "New Skills for New Jobs" initiative.

7. Ensure more effectively employers' awareness of existing policy, partnership and mobility tools and frameworks for cooperation, such as the Recommendation on key competences, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF).

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## ANNEX TO THE ANNEX

1. The strategic goal set for the European Union at the Lisbon European Council meeting held on 23-24 March 2000;

2. The Education Council Report of 12 February 2001 submitted to the European Council at its meeting in Stockholm on 23 and 24 March 2001 on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems[1];

3. The Council Conclusions of 11/12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)[2];

4. The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling higher education to make its full contribution to the Lisbon strategy[3], and the Council Resolution of 23 November 2007 on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy.

5. The Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on efficiency and equity in education and training of 15 November 2006[4];

6. Decision No.1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006, establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning[5];

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[1] doc. 5980/01.
[2] Doc. 8984/09.
[3] OJ C 292/1, 24.11.2005.
[4] OJ C 298, 8.12.2006, point 8 and 10 in "State that".
[5] OJ L 327, 24.11.2006.

7. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning[6];

8. The Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on New Skills for New Jobs[7]

9. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of 23 April 2008[8];

10. The Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 22 May 2008 on promoting creativity and innovation through education and training[9];

11. The Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning[10];

12. The Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training[11];

13 The Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools[12];

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6 OJ L 394, 30.12.2006.
7 OJ C 290, 4.12.2007.
8 OJ C 111, 6.5.2008.
9 OJ C 141, 7.6.2008.
10 OJ C 140, 6.6.2008.
11 OJ C 18, 24.1.2009.
12 OJ C 319, 13.12.2008.

14. The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies [13];

15. The Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism[14];

16. The Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on youth mobility[15];

17. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)[16];

18. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training[17];

19. The Commission Communication *"Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning"* of February 2006, which is aimed at raising awareness of the importance of including entrepreneurship education in all stages of general education.[18].

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[13] OJ C 319, 13.12.2008.
[14] OJ C 320, 16.12.2008.
[15] OJ C 320, 16.12.2008.
[16] Adoption on 11/12 May 2009.
[17] Adoption on 11/12 May 2009.
[18] Doc. 6505/06 - without prejudice to the Council's position on this text.

20. The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - *"New Skills for New Jobs - Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs"*[19] and the Conclusions of the Council responding to that Communication.[20]

21. The Commission Communication "A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University Business dialogue" of 2 April 2009.[21]

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[19] Doc. 17537/08
[20] Adopted on 9 and 10 March 2009, doc. 6479/09.
[21] Doc. 8511/09 - without prejudice to the Council's position on this text.