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Subject: Education crossing borders: new opportunities and challenges
- *Policy debate*
[Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency]]

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council meeting on 20-21 May 2014.

Education crossing borders: new opportunities and challenges

Presidency discussion paper

Education and training is undergoing a process of change in which borders matter less than in the past. While the education and training of most European citizens takes place within national - or even regional - borders and systems, a growing, albeit still limited, phenomenon of cross-border education is emerging across Europe, driven by internationalisation, competition and the Internet.

In this context, cross-border education is to be understood primarily as education and training providers that move to other countries for the purpose of delivering study programmes. Provision of this kind can take place either in a traditional face-to-face form, or by online/digital means, or by using a combination of the two ("blended learning").

Traditional forms of cross-border education are currently experiencing an upward trend, although their critical mass is still limited to some EU Member States. This kind of provision is often private and consists of branch campuses, franchising and validation agreements. A recent EU study¹ mapped the situation in the EU and examined the risks, benefits and quality issues involved. Although the response from authorities to this phenomenon varies from country to country, many of the issues at stake are shared: these include the quality and quantity of what is provided by national education systems, issues relating to funding, cost coverage and tuition fees, the notion of service in the case of private education, issues relating to free access and free movement, barriers to the operation of providers, the recognition of credits and degrees, and the language in which courses are given.

¹ *Delivering Education across Borders in the European Union*, 2013, accessible at http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/borders_en.pdf

As for cross-border provision based on online resources, this is developing rapidly through the spread of ICT tools and Open Educational Resources (OERs), and in particular through the development of the potentially transformational model of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Initiatives undertaken at EU level and by national and international groupings of educational institutions are aimed at exploiting the expected benefits of such resources in terms of increased access, both for learners to education and training and for providers to learners, that is not restricted by national boundaries.

The issue of the quality of both off-line and online cross-border provision is among those addressed by the Council conclusions on quality assurance supporting education and training to be submitted for adoption by ministers prior to the policy debate. The conclusions encourage cross-border cooperation and cross-border use of quality assurance bodies (including agencies) to underpin the functioning of cross-border education, learning mobility and joint programmes, as well as to address quality assurance issues relating to the assessment and certification of new modes of online learning.

While these trends often originate in the higher education sector, they are by no means limited to it. In particular, initial and continuing VET and adult learning also stand to benefit from these new tools. Even in the school sector, European platforms such as e-Twinning have created opportunities to open up education through virtual mobility.

Questions for the policy debate

In the light of these developments and the proposed Council conclusions on quality assurance supporting education and training, Ministers are invited to consider the following questions:

- (a) How, from a national perspective, do you view the opportunities and challenges presented by cross-border education? In particular, what are the implications in terms of quality assurance and how can access for providers and recognition for learners be facilitated?**
- (b) What added value can the EU bring to promoting, facilitating and developing quality assurance for the different forms of cross-border education?**

In order to give all Ministers the opportunity to contribute, as well as to foster a more interactive discussion, interventions should be as brief and concise as possible. In this way, Ministers will have the option of intervening more than once.

The Presidency's aim is not only that each Minister should leave the discussion with ideas which they can take back to their capitals for further discussion, but also to provide possible future guidance for EU policy in these areas, building partially on and complementing the Council conclusions on quality assurance.
