

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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***Abstract:** To improve the European education and training systems, reforms applied by EU should concern both changes in the administrative structure of the educational institutions and the development of combined public-private initiatives. The role of higher education in EU external relations is increasing, towards neighbouring, in relation with industrialised countries and with developing countries. It is important to make available all the theoretical and practical elements involved to substantiate the new education policies, improving academic management and planning of cultural, scientific and social role to play for universities. Lifelong education is a form of pedagogy that implies raising investment in people and knowledge and is accomplished through e-learning, continuing education or correspondence courses.*

***Keywords:** knowledge, reform, efficiency, lifelong learning.*

1. EU POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The higher education policy of the European Commission aims at reforming higher education systems, making them more coherent, more flexible, and more responsive to the needs of society.

Reforms are needed in order to face the challenges of globalisation and to train and retrain the European workforce.

Reforms should enable universities to play their role in the Europe of Knowledge and make a strong contribution to the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

The Commission has identified three big reform areas in higher education:

- Curricular reform - The three cycle system (bachelor-masters-doctorate), competence based learning, flexible learning paths, recognition, mobility;
- Governance reform - University autonomy, strategic partnerships including enterprises, quality assurance;
- Funding reform - Diversified university income, better linked to performance; promoting access, equity and efficiency; the possible role of tuition fees, grants and loans; targeted EU funding.

2. ATTRACTIVENESS AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

The European Higher Education Area [1] is seen as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions.

The Commission looks forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by sharing experiences of reform processes with neighbouring regions. Also there is a need for dialogue on issues of mutual interest and to elaborate an external dimension strategy.

The role and visibility of higher education in EU external relations is increasing, towards neighbouring countries (European Neighbourhood Policy), in relation with industrialised countries and with developing countries (for example the Union's new Africa Strategy).

Policy dialogue between the EU and third countries often includes higher education, not least due to the emergence of a European Higher Education Area, the recent summit with Latin America being a case in point.

The Commission is supporting a broad range of capacity building measures to modernise the content and practices of higher education in 26 neighbouring countries and to bring systems in line with the Bologna requirements through the Tempus programme, which also opens new development opportunities for EU universities. In the past 17 years, Tempus has funded 6500 university cooperation projects, involving 2000 universities from the EU and its partner countries.

Programmes such as Alfa/Alban and AsiaLink have greatly strengthened Europe's cooperative links with countries in Latin America and Asia respectively. The Union's higher education cooperation agreements with the USA and Canada have just been placed on a new and more stable basis through their renewal for a further 8-year period.

Of special importance in this context is the EU's flagship programme for worldwide academic cooperation, Erasmus Mundus. The core elements of the programme – jointly developed European Masters Courses – are making a powerful contribution to improving the attractiveness of “destination Europe” [2].

By the end of the programme's first phase in 2008, 100 Courses and 8,000 scholarship-holders will have received support. The Erasmus Mundus Partnerships between the European Masters Courses and higher education institutions in other world regions, which also provide grants to facilitate outgoing mobility of students and faculty engaged in the Masters Courses, are beginning to emerge as an instrument with high potential for establishing sustainable future worldwide links.

3. RELATED APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING EFFICIENCY IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

3.1. INVESTMENT

The European Council called for “a substantial annual increase in per capital investment in human resources”. This concerns all countries and particularly those below the EU average.

Besides, a targeted increase in public investment can be achieved within the framework of the overall budgetary constraints, if necessary by re-allocating towards education funds from other fields that currently have a lower return, according of course to the situation in each country and to the national political choices.

Moreover, private investment is necessary to ensure an increase in the resources devoted to the education and training systems.

However, the increase in private investment should not imply a decrease in public investment but rather act as a necessary complement.

3.2. EFFICIENCY APPROACHES

To improve the governance of European education and training systems, reforms should concern both changes in the administrative structure of the educational institutions [2] and the development of combined public-private initiatives.

Organisational changes should aim at introducing new methods of financial and project management (e.g. the use of “management by objective” schemes to ensure that funds are properly targeted and that an accountability system is in place which matches the result obtained with the cost) while granting significant decision-making authority at the local level. Public-private initiatives should be used more systematically to encourage the exchange of efficient management techniques between both sectors.

Organisational changes with a better mix between decentralisation and centralisation are one way of **improving the administrative structure**. Another involves changes in school inputs by envisaging well-targeted input measures focussing on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. longer term length or more “time on task” for students with difficulties).

Public-private initiatives relate to better coordination between the public and private sectors (e.g. on dual education). They also concern the private provision of academic and non-academic services such as research contracts or accommodation services. This not

only raises funds but also introduces new methods of management. The institutional changing needed by European integration and by appropriation of the principles of Bologna Declaration will stimulate all the Romanian university resources (organizational, knowledge and human resources).

It is crucial in order to fulfill this process to make available all the theoretical and practical elements involved to substantiate the new education policies, improving institutional design, improving academic management and planning of cultural, scientific, cultural and social role to play for universities.

It is also needed to increase the efficiency of the institutional structures of the universities. The project has the following objectives that will be fulfilling by using applicative methods of practical and theoretical philosophy [2]:

- To know both relationship between cognitive and cultural values and educational environment and the structures and processes for institutionalization of knowledge;
- To achieve theories and models of knowledge institutionalization and to institutional changing also; these theories and models will be bases for improving educational policies, developing and changing strategy, improving academic management and knowledge management;
- To facilitate the European integration process of Romanian universities through developing institutional capacity needed by elaborating and implementing of policies, strategies and development programs;
- To train human resources needed by the researching from an institutional point of view;
- To increase the interests of academics in order to approach the institutional perspective on their didactical and researching role they have to play.

4. TRANSITION FROM UNIVERSITY TO ACTIVE LIFE

Actions targeting the transition from school to active life will facilitate the insertion of

graduates on the labour market. The education and training provided in initial universities will be accompanied by in-company training, apprenticeships, outreach programmes for students organized in close partnership with business community.

The development and provision of guiding and counseling will complement the above mentioned actions and will facilitate the transition from school to workplace and the change in the status from student to future employee.

The actions under this key area of intervention will provide a systematic support to internships as part of the educational process and will seek the preparation of the future graduate for the labour market and the graduate relationship with the employer.

Schools and universities may also market their educational offer targets by developing awareness raising measures which include brochures presenting occupational profiles, the motivation for taking up a job etc. At the same time, the whole activity of the didactical staff should be targeted towards preparing pupils and students in order to integrate as quickly and as efficient as possible into an ongoing changing society.

In order to implement these ideas, the measures should be the following [3]:

- Work based learning schemes and programmes for students;
- Support school / university / enterprise partnerships initiatives;
- Monitoring of the insertion of graduates into labour market;
- Innovative actions in view of improving transition from school to working life.

5. LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong education is a form of pedagogy often accomplished through distance learning or e-learning, continuing education or correspondence courses [5]. It also includes postgraduate programs for those who want to improve their qualification, bring their skills up to date or retrain for a new line of work.

According to the EU documents, lifelong learning is essential for personal, civic and social purposes as well as for employment-

related purposes. It takes place in a variety of environments in and outside the formal education and training systems.

The promotion of lifelong learning, based on a life cycle approach in learning, opens up access to knowledge and takes account of all types of learning - formal and informal - and all levels, from nursery school to higher education and adult education. The need for transforming formal education and training systems in order to break down barriers between different forms of learning and broaden access and participation to learning should be priorities for national policy.

For employment related purposes, the modernization of the education and training systems should target more flexible provision, increased relevance of the knowledge and competences delivered for the labour market needs and broaden access to all forms of learning for individuals in life cycle approach.

In Romania, the priority is lifelong learning for employment market related issues and individuals [1], in terms of broadening and diversifying forms of learning, provision of skills and competences, etc.

6. CONCLUSION

To obtain efficient education and training systems, reforms should concern changes in the administrative structure of the educational

institutions and the development of combined public-private initiatives.

In order to achieve the best employment opportunities, universities should develop awareness raising measures which include brochures presenting occupational profiles and the motivation for taking up a job.

Lifelong learning implies raising investment in people and knowledge, promoting the acquisition of basic skills, including digital literacy and broadening opportunities for innovative, more flexible forms of learning.

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