

Balance of EU versus Member State Competences in Education, Training and Youth

Education and Training Questions

General Issues

- Does EU action, as opposed to national government action, in the areas of education and vocational training generally benefit or disadvantage the UK? Can you point us to any published evidence or analysis in support of your view?

EU action benefits national government by providing a driver to bring Member States together (through policy forums or projects) to share information and good practice. It also provides a common framework for producing statistics across EU Member States which allow comparisons and benchmarks (although the OECD education and training statistics have a higher profile and are potentially more useful, e.g. PISA and PIAAC).

- Are there any specific EU activities in the areas of education and training that you consider particularly beneficial or particularly disadvantageous to the UK?
- Do you think the EU, as opposed to national government, should do more or less in relation to education and training? If so, where and why?

There is too much reporting required at EU level. It should better coordinate its request for information on policy and other developments in Member States as MS are currently asked by CEDEFOP (e.g. ReferNet on VET) in overlapping questionnaires/reports for the same information, which threatens disengagement by the MS (or devolved nations). The EU also needs to better market the value of these questionnaires as they are often perceived by MS as an unwieldy but politically necessary 'tick-box' exercise, without making use of the other MS' reports.

- What other areas of EU competence or activity have an impact on education and training in your sector and how?

- What challenges or opportunities are there for the UK in further EU action on education?

The EU-level thematic working groups are useful provided that they have tangible outcomes otherwise there is a danger of them becoming (or being perceived back at home) as 'talking shops'. As the UK Government has decided against setting national education and training benchmarks, and to use proxies instead, it makes the annual process of reporting against these benchmarks somewhat meaningless.

- What international bodies or arrangements other than the EU are important to education and training in the UK? How does your experience of dealing with them compare with the EU's activity in this sphere?

OECD – see comment above regarding comparative statistics. Also applies (to lesser degree) to their research – higher profile than EU's work. The British Council also do some good work in the sphere of education in the UK and internationally.

The Programmes

- For the specific programmes which are funded and managed via the EU (such as Erasmus or Leonardo), what are the benefits or disadvantages of having EU rather than national responsibility and funding for these activities?

The EU-funded programmes such as EU LLP and Erasmus+ are transnational and require partnership with other Member States, which broadens out the learning beyond the Member State, which is beneficial. The National Assembly for Wales' Enterprise and Business Committee has, as part of an inquiry into Wales' use of EU funds, has received very positive feedback from Welsh organisations who have participated in the EU LLP, on the added value of the programme. The Key Action 3 of Erasmus+ on policy experimentation should also provide broader lesson learning than possible under a national programme.

It raises the profile of the programmes across Europe as a whole – consistency in the promotion of the programme across Europe. It encourages partnerships to develop across Europe without any pressure to link with a particular country and perhaps national responsibility for these programmes would mean certain countries being prioritised at a government level for projects more than others. The impact is that it gives a wholly European dimension to the projects and ensures that the collation of data is available centrally for the programmes.

- Can you point to evidence which shows that language learning has improved through participation in the programmes?

Whilst we cannot point to any statistical evidence of an improvement in language learning but evaluations conducted with learners who have participated in mobility projects state that they had picked up basic phrases and words during their work placements and had received language tuition before undertaking their work placement. Many vocational learners who participate in these mobilities have little or no previous language competence and what always comes out during evaluations is that they do realise that not everyone does speak English across Europe and that they wished they had received more language tuition before going. The work placement opportunity definitely provides young people with a compelling reason to learn the basics of another language. However, within Wales, the desire to increase the number of learners participating in mobilities overseas is not reflected in the importance attached to language learning i.e. less than 25% of learners take a modern language at GCSE level.

- How would you describe the costs and benefits to your organisation of participating in the programmes?

The Welsh Government pays approximately £165,000 annually towards the cost of managing the EU Lifelong Learning Programme (EU LLP) (now Erasmus+) programme in the UK. This, effectively, allows Welsh organisations to bid for Erasmus+ funding and benefit from the advice and other support offered by the national agency (British Council, in partnership with Ecorys). In return, Welsh organisations have secured €4.2m from EU LLP in 2013.

In terms of costs there is staff time in organising appropriate training plans and coordinating the logistics of the overseas visit and staff time in accompanying learners overseas (if needed) and all of our colleges insist on this for health & safety reasons.

The benefits include improved employer engagement for the curriculum areas within the college when apprentices take part in the mobilities. The development of 'soft skills' of the learners who participate in mobility projects (confidence, self-esteem, resilience, problem solving) and learners realising that job opportunities are available to them in Europe. The participating learners' CVs are enhanced and evidence available to corroborate this through

Europass Mobility.

Policy Coordination

- Have you noticed any change in EU activity or emphasis since the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and the introduction of Europe 2020, and, if so, where has this manifested itself and in what ways? Have these changes been helpful or unhelpful?

There has been an increased burden on Member States to report on education and training policy and programme development, Copenhagen process, National Reform Programme etc. The Bruges Communiqué has introduced a burdensome questionnaire and reporting on VET policy and programme developments, with little understanding by the Member States completing these of the benefits of these processes to them.

- Is it appropriate that Europe 2020 focusses on early school leaving and the completion of tertiary education?

There is a fine line to tread in terms of EU competence in these areas. It is acceptable to focus on these areas only in terms of supporting and adding value to Member State policies and actions.

- Has the adoption of EU education policy frameworks or Council Recommendations had any impact on your sector?

- How does policy cooperation on education in the EU compare with other organisations, for example the OECD?

- Can you point to examples of national reform in policy which have resulted from EU co-operation in education and training?

- How would you assess the costs and benefits to policy makers of participation in education policy co-operation at EU level?

The benefits could be improved if they were well set out by the EU, and concrete examples given. It must be acknowledged, however, that it is also a responsibility of the Member State to take lessons for participation in education policy co-operation and adopt/adapt them in their own education/training policies.

Youth questions

General issues

- What evidence is there that EU action in the area of Youth benefits or disadvantages the UK?

- Do you think the EU should do more, or less, in relation to Youth, and why?

- Do you think the EU focuses on the right aims and priorities in the Youth field?

- Have you noticed any change in EU activity or emphasis since the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and the introduction of Europe 2020, and, if so, where has this manifested itself and in what ways? Have these changes been helpful or unhelpful?

- Has the adoption of the Structured Dialogue had any impact on your sector?

- What other areas of EU competence or activity have an impact on your sector and how?
- What international bodies or arrangements are important to your sector beyond the EU?
- Has the EU had an impact on young people's opportunities to have a voice in policy and decision making, or on organisations' work to involve young people in shaping services?
- Has the EU had an impact on young people's social inclusion in the UK?

Youth Programmes

- What are the benefits or disadvantages of having EU rather than national funding for activities under the Youth Programme?
- What do you think about the criteria and conditions set by the EU for applying for and receiving funding?
- What do you think about the aims and activities of Erasmus+ in comparison to the Youth in Action programme?

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