

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION
PUBLIC CONSULTATION
FUTURE DESIGN OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH
PROGRAMMES AFTER 2006**

A. The actions needed to put the aims set out by the European Commission in the base document into practice

Topics for consultation

A.1 What general or specific needs in the fields of education, training and youth should be addressed by future European Union programme action?

“The European Union has a particular role to play in relation to: citizenship, freedom of movement, whether for the purposes of learning or employment.”¹

Non-formal and informal education and training experiences

The European Union must stress the importance of education and training in promoting cultural understanding, democratic values, tolerance and solidarity helping to build greater social cohesion within the Union. In particular, CEV calls for a wider recognition of the role non-formal and informal education and training experiences, such as voluntary activities, can play in this process. The European Union must also recognise that non-formal and informal education and training experiences also contribute to the personal and professional development of the individual.² We ask that NGOs play a leading role in developing and implementing methodologies and standards to assess and value non-formal and informal education and training experiences. We also ask that NGOs play a more active role in defining education and training needs. In this sense, the European Union should aim to strengthen partnerships between the formal education and training sector and the voluntary sector, which has *“a wealth of experience in non-formal education on which governments could draw in implementing lifelong learning measures and strategies.”³*

Further development of the European Voluntary Service Programme

Wider recognition of the role of non-formal and informal education and training, such as voluntary activities, should be reflected in increased levels of support for transnational voluntary activities of not only younger people and youth at disadvantage, but older persons, the disabled, the long-term unemployed, those seeking reintegration into the labour market after a career break etc.. Particularly

¹ Communication from the Commission, “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” COM (2001) 678, P. 25.

² The European Voluntary Service Programme has *not* contributed *“to increased recognition of non-formal education even though the Programme has served as a good example.”* Commission Staff Working Paper “Youth for Europe” and “European Voluntary Service” Evaluation Report, October 2001, p. 30.

³ European Parliament Report on the Commission Communication, “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” COM (2001) 678. Rapporteur: Kathleen Van Brempt.

in the case of older persons, the European Union is facing the common policy challenge of an increasingly ageing but healthy population still keen to contribute actively to society. In volunteering, it is true that in general terms, volunteerism among older people is on the increase, growing in terms of numbers, of the range of activities, and of the impact on communities and societies. CEV considers that transnational voluntary activity among older people will not only bring considerable experience and skills to local communities, but will help foster continued participation and a stronger European identity among this generation. We also believe that the European Union should support inter-generational programmes and activities.

In this context, the European Union must increase significantly its levels of support for transnational volunteer activities to ensure access to certain target groups (ring-fencing a part of the budget for participation by these groups) while not reducing the number of opportunities to those people who wish to participate with high educational attainment (where demand at present is very high).

CEV considers that the European Union must ensure that there are better opportunities for all persons to undertake a period of voluntary service in another Member State or candidate country and to have this experience fully recognised, in a transparent manner, throughout the Union. In every sense, European Voluntary Service should in no way be seen as a sub-category of youth work but a worthwhile action in its own right. Under its present design, the participation of organisations in EVS is largely limited to those that work with youth while organisations working with older volunteers in a transnational context have no possibility to use it.

Exchange of experience, best practice and innovation

CEV considers that the European Union has a particular role to play in education, training and youth in relation to the exchange of experience, best practice and innovation across Member States and the associated countries. It also has a special role to play in promoting a stronger European identity. This can be achieved by encouraging the greater mobility of teachers, trainers, trainees and volunteers, as well as encouraging networking and cooperation between institutions, organisations and individuals.

Transnational exchanges within the NGO sector

We believe that European education, training and youth programmes must aim to strengthen networking between NGOs operating at national levels. Transnational exchanges within the NGO sector would offer non-formal education and training opportunities that would help strengthen the sector whilst build a stronger European identity. Such exchanges should be considered equal with transnational exchanges within the formal education and training sector.

Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities attached to the final act of the Treaty of Amsterdam recognises “*the important contribution made by voluntary service activities to developing social solidarity*” and commits Member States “*to encouraging the European dimension of voluntary organisations with particular emphasis on the exchange of information and experience as well as on the participation of the young and the elderly in voluntary activity.*”

A.2 Which of the types of action supported by our current programmes will still be appropriate for the period beyond 2006? Which – if any - new ones should be added? Which – if any – should be dropped? Why?

European Voluntary Service Programme

The European Voluntary Service Programme has “*had a significant, positive impact on the young people participating in terms of raising their inter-cultural awareness, enabling them to acquire skills and improving their self-confidence and their capacity for initiative and creativity.*”⁴

“*The volunteer brought new ideas, practices and inspiration to the local host community and through his/her presence the inter-cultural awareness and the awareness of the European Union was increased.*”⁵

CEV considers the European Voluntary Service Programme to be a worthwhile action. It responds to the four mutually supporting objectives on lifelong learning (which is the guiding principle of European Union education, training and youth policy) of “*personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability*”.⁶ CEV is keen however that the programme support volunteerism in Europe on a larger-scale (see both A.1 and A.3).

Entitlement Voucher System

The European Union should investigate possibilities for establishing some form of voucher entitlement system. Upon reaching the age of 18, EU citizens or those resident in the Union for a specified period, would be entitled to a small grant (around 2,000 – 3,000 EURO) to work, study, train or volunteer in another EU Member State for a period of at least three months before they reached the age of 30. The grant would be channelled through recognised government, post-secondary or training institutions or the voluntary sector as appropriate, as opposed to given directly to the individual. Each individual would receive the grant only once and it would be subject to participation in some form of orientation or re-entry programme and/or the writing of a report. This scheme would replace the existing ERASMUS Programme which is an elitist entitlement programme. Instead, the system proposed offers greater possibilities for more diverse participation in EU Programmes responding to the objective of increased social inclusion. It would be limited to European Union Member States since a core objective would be the fostering of a European identity.

Transnational networks

Transnational networks active in the sector and with a specific target group (such as youth at disadvantage, the disabled, the unemployed etc.) should be supported by the European Union to develop vocational training programmes, voluntary activities etc.. Such networks provide a central forum through which to exchange information, experience, policy and practice. They provide

⁴ Commission Staff Working Paper “Youth for Europe” and “European Voluntary Service” Evaluation Report, October 2001, p. 18.

⁵ Commission Staff Working Paper “Youth for Europe” and “European Voluntary Service” Evaluation Report, October 2001, p. 21.

⁶ Communication from the Commission on “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” COM (2001) 678.

opportunities for support and partnerships. They are particularly important in the context of fostering wider participation in the programmes and developing a European identity.

Mobility grants

CEV considers that there is a need for the expansion of grants to support the mobility of volunteers (covering travel, accommodation and subsistence costs of the volunteer, adequate insurance, language and cultural preparation, pedagogical support etc.).

A.3 How can our programmes more effectively complement action at national, regional and local levels (e.g. mobility grants), as well as other EU programmes? How can they harness best practice in different countries, to achieve an outcome greater than the sum of all the parts?

The volunteer infrastructure

CEV considers that European voluntary service activities and European grants to support the mobility of volunteers should link into, and aim to strengthen the existing international, national and regional infrastructures that support voluntary action. This will increase levels of support for European volunteer activities as well as the number of volunteers participating in the programme. For many CEV members, there is a strong need to add the “European dimension” to their existing portfolio of volunteer activities. At the same time however, the European Union must ensure that there is synergy between investments in European voluntary service activities and volunteer mobility grants and investments at national level in the volunteer infrastructure. Intermediaries and promoters of the programmes should have a stronger role in developing the voluntary sector by engaging new organisations, developing training modules etc..

Strengthening the voluntary sector

CEV believes that current design and management of programmes does *not* effectively complement action at national, regional and local levels. We consider that the present system of National Agencies acting as managers of individual placements diverts essential human and other resources away from the voluntary sector and thus opportunities for capacity-building within the sector itself. In addition, they are not sufficiently making use of existing networks, organisations and specialists in the field. And National Agencies, necessarily engaged in the management and monitoring of the programmes, are not well-placed to ensure that programme actions are integrated into, and complement, the wider portfolio of education, training, youth and volunteer activities.

A.4 How can our programmes better encourage innovation and its transfer into mainstream activity?

Recognition of transnational voluntary service activities

The European Voluntary Service Programme has played an important role in raising the profile of voluntary activity in Europe (and in particular in the candidate countries where voluntary activity enjoys less of a tradition). Its value, as a tool for non-formal education, training and development as well as inclusion, solidarity and community advancement is now more widely recognised. The

programme has also been very important in highlighting the legal and administrative barriers to transnational voluntary service activities that still exist in several Member States and candidate countries. In this sense, CEV finds it ironic that while a major theme of the European Union has been the elimination of barriers between Member States, at the same time programmes with an international element are introduced and promoted without any serious attempt to harmonise the programmes at national levels or to harmonise enabling legislation. At the same time, there is the issue of volunteers participating in the EVS Programme enjoying a legal status different from that of volunteers participating in other transnational voluntary service programmes.

CEV considers that EVS volunteers should not enjoy a status different from that of other volunteers participating in similar alternative transnational voluntary service programmes. This has been the case in several Member States and candidate countries in relation to visa requirements for example, where volunteers participating in the EVS programme have been treated as a separate category. CEV strongly believes that there should be a much wider recognition of the value and importance of non-formal education and training including voluntary activity and including private initiatives, national and/or regional volunteer programmes. A much wider recognition of their value and importance would help foster links between the formal education and training sector and the non-formal and informal sector, as well as encourage employers to value volunteering more actively and thus encourage the transfer of the wider concept of transnational voluntary service activities into mainstream activity. At the same time however, it should be stressed that voluntary activity is an act undertaken of a persons' own free will without concern for financial gain. Its recognition should not be conditional on achieving other political objectives, such as reducing unemployment statistics etc..

“Greater emphasis should be placed on mobility and voluntary service which are still not sufficiently widespread and not properly recognised.”⁷

Innovation and the development of best practice

CEV believes that the way European education, training and YOUTH Programmes are presently designed and managed is too inflexible to allow for broad participation levels, innovation and the development of best practice within the sector. CEV members consider that if European education, training and YOUTH Programmes are to foster innovation and diverse participation within the Union, they must be flexible enough to:

- a) Grant autonomy to the sector to define its own needs and the actions to respond to these needs;
- b) Involve smaller, localised less well-resourced organisations (see C. 4). This is necessarily higher-risk funding however the European Union must decide whether programmes are about innovation, cooperation, building the capacity of the voluntary sector etc. or whether they are about complex, lengthy bureaucratic procedures.

B. Geographical coverage

⁷ European Commission White Paper, “A New Impetus for European Youth”, November 2001, P. 13.

Topics for consultation

B.1 What types of action in education, training and youth are most relevant for co-operation with “third countries” (i.e. those beyond the 31 EU, EEA and candidate countries)?

Volunteer exchanges

CEV members consider that education, training and youth actions alike must be retained and indeed expanded with third countries. Actions such as the European Voluntary Service Programme help foster cultural understanding, solidarity, tolerance, language learning etc. among young people which is in the European Union’s greater interest. However we also believe that there should be a strong emphasis by the programmes on reciprocal exchanges of volunteers and on removing obstacles to volunteers coming to the Union from third countries (for example by creating a special visa for the purposes of voluntary activity). CEV also considers that reciprocal transnational voluntary service opportunities for older persons would also be relevant for cooperation with third countries since older people have considerable experience and skills to offer local communities. No region should be exempt from cooperation with the EU, and there should be transparency in relation to which third countries and regions are prioritised within a particular phase of the programmes and which are excluded (these decisions should be made public).

B.2 Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci essentially reflect the needs of Europe’s own citizens; but Tempus (and other Community activities) use education to build relations between the EU and third countries, even as a tool for development aid. Do we currently have the balance right between these two types of action? Should the EU promote more links between its own education and training institutions and the rest of the world, or should it concentrate on intra-European links?

Inter-cultural understanding and dialogue, globalisation

European Union education, training and youth programmes should reflect principally the needs of Europe’s citizens. However where programmes look at cultural understanding and dialogue, best harnessing (and tackling the problems associated with) the process of globalisation, the EU should promote strong links between its own education and training institutions and organisations (formal, non-formal and informal) and those of third countries.

These links should be promoted on a multilateral level since Member States already organise initiatives of a bilateral nature. In addition, Europe should identify itself as a region in relationships with other regions and cultures.

B.3 Should we retain separate programmes broadly targeting (1) EU, EEA and candidate countries, and (2) the rest of the world? Or should third countries be included in the main education, training and youth programmes? If so, how?

Rather than separate programmes for third countries, a specific budget should be set aside for this type of cooperation. Decisions as to which countries are involved and which are excluded should be made public, civil society should participate in the debate, and final decisions should in no way

reflect the former colonial ties of individual Member States since they are sovereign states and can operate their own programmes in this respect.

C. Programme design and organisation

Topics for consultation

C.1 Up to now we have had separate programmes for education, training and youth work. Is it better to keep these separate programmes, which can reflect the specificity of the areas they deal with; or would it be better to have fewer programme(s) covering the whole lifelong learning process, within which education, training and youth would each find its place?

Flexibility

CEV believes that fewer programmes with broader coverage would be a more practical approach. For example a European Voluntary Service Programme involving volunteer of all ages and allowing for inter-generational projects to be developed.

Programmes should also be flexible (in both design and management) because they recognise and respect the specificities and needs of each target group and the organisations involved. For example, NGOs are often sources of innovative new ideas and approaches and operate at grassroots level, closest to the potential beneficiaries. However they are also vulnerable, unable to withstand financial uncertainty and delays in the delivery of payments.

CEV also believes it is also important to ensure there are synergies between the formal education and training sector and the non-formal and informal sector in future programmes.

Programme management

There are opportunities within the current programmes for the European Union to look at, and reflect on, the very different procedures and approaches to management of the different education, training and youth programmes. For example, mobility is a common theme running through the distinct programmes and mobility grants are available for university students (under ERASMUS), trainees (under Leonardo da Vinci) and young volunteers (under the EVS Programme). However the management systems developed for each of the actions is completely different. The European Union must consider which is the most efficient approach. In terms of the European Voluntary Service, the present system would benefit from a radical re-think to avoid the lengthy, expensive and bureaucratic system presently in place.

C.2 What could be the most effective mode of organisation for future programmes? By type of organisation? By type of activity? By groups of potential beneficiaries?

Type of activity vs. target groups

“The programme will only be acceptable in the political arena if it serves large numbers of students, teachers and institutions and a limited number of more ambitious and more costly pilot innovative

actions.”⁸

CEV believes that while division of programmes by type of activity is probably the most effective mode of organisation for future programmes to attract and achieve high levels of participation. However, we also believe that there is a strong need to develop and support programmes and projects targeting certain groups (for example youth at disadvantage etc.) and that part of the budget should be ring-fenced for these groups to allow for greater participation levels.

The European Union must achieve a balance between serving large numbers of students, teachers, trainers/trainees, volunteers, institutions and organisations and achieving diverse participation levels.

C.3 Some of the existing programme actions, such as individual mobility grants, are managed de-centrally via National Agencies in the participating countries. Other actions, such as large multinational projects, are managed centrally by the European Commission with the help of its Technical Assistance Office. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches? Can they be improved?

CEV believes that European civil society networks play an important role in bringing organisations and individuals together, developing a sense of solidarity and a helping build European identity. The European Union must achieve a balance between centrally managed large multinational projects and smaller ventures managed de-centrally via National Agencies. CEV considers that there is a strong need for large multinational projects managed centrally of an experimental nature (for example looking at new target groups or themes). However where smaller projects are managed de-centrally via National Agencies, the European Union must ensure that they work in partnership with civil society organisations in the defining, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of projects in order to build a stronger, more active and inclusive civil society close to the needs of Europe’s citizens. CEV considers that granting significant resources to National Agencies is to divert essential human and other resources away from the voluntary sector (see A.3). In order to ensure common concepts and standards are adhered to by civil society organisations, these should be defined centrally and administered nationally.

C.4 Are any potential participants in the programme excluded because of the way it is designed or run? Are all the main stakeholders in education, training and youth suitably involved in the programmes (at European, national, regional and local levels)? What are the barriers that keep out those who currently do not take part or are under-represented, such as SMEs and the social partners, and how can they be lifted?

Smaller, more localised organisations

CEV members have voiced valid concerns that the present design and management of European education, training and youth programmes is not always conducive to participation by smaller, more localised and less well-resourced voluntary organisations.

⁸ ERASMUS. Observations and Recommendations (1998 – 2000).

Complex and lengthy bureaucratic procedures, delays, inconsistencies, heavy reporting requirements etc. actually serve to prevent smaller voluntary organisations from participating in EU Programmes. In the case of the European Voluntary Service Programme, it is not the involvement of National Agencies per se that poses the problem, rather that the present system is complex and cumbersome and the role of the National Agencies vis-à-vis participating organisations and the individual volunteers is not clear. The present system requires the centralised approval of hosting expressions of interest, followed by the simultaneous approval of a project application by both hosting and sending organisations. The system is complex, bureaucratic, lengthy, and there are several opportunities along the way for the whole procedure to break down. In addition, it is not made clear why a project has been accepted or refused. An alternative system must be developed whereby one application is made for one volunteer or intermediaries manage the whole process from start to finish for several young volunteers. Greater transparency in project selection/refusal is also key to widening participation levels. In addition, certification systems for organisations and/or projects participating in the EVS programme should be standardised between participating countries.

Match Funding

CEV also strongly believes that volunteer contributions in kind should be considered as match funding with status equal to monetary support. This is particularly important in the context of widening participation to disadvantaged groups since it is the only resource these groups may have access to. In addition, many organisations find it difficult to secure match funding nationally as national funders are sometimes unwilling to fund European initiatives.

Youth “at disadvantage”

The present YOUTH programme has as its priority the engagement of youth “at disadvantage”. However, there has been limited success at engaging this target group within the programme and in particular within the European Voluntary Service Programme. This is for several reasons:

- a) Structural inefficiencies within the programme result in heavy administrative procedures for small, localised organisations and time-delays in the processing of applications that are not acceptable for this target group;
- b) The EVS Programme is a “one-off” activity however in order to engage youth at disadvantage, a robust support structure must be in place to support a lengthy preparation and reintegration phase. The programme does not support the additional costs involved in working with disadvantaged groups;
- c) There are limited incentives for organisations to send volunteers (rather than host volunteers).

However, transnational networks of limited size have been more successful in this field since they are a central source of knowledge, training and support for organisations interested in participating in the programme. They also reduce significantly the administrative and time burden on participating organisations. Redesign of European education, training and youth programmes should take this into account and provide an enabling framework for transnational networks working with specific target groups. This could be funded centrally or de-centrally. Alternatively, national Agencies should play a larger role in the administration of the programme.

Ceilings on certain elements of programmes

CEV considers that budgetary “ceilings” should not be placed on particular elements of projects, such as translation costs in the case of multinational ventures. This can incur significant additional costs for participating organisations thus excluding smaller less well-resourced organisations from the programmes (and effectively subsidising the EU).

Finally, improvements to programmes and the ensuring of representation of all key stakeholders can be better assured by consulting more widely and regularly the various European, national and regional organisations and bodies active in the sector as advisors.

C.5 How to build sufficient flexibility into the programme design and the definition of its component actions to permit it to respond to the common policy challenges facing European countries in the coming years?

Widening participation

The YOUTH programme has enjoyed some success in engaging groups of beneficiaries and organisations that would have otherwise been excluded from European Union programmes such as Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci. Any future programmes must ensure that these groups retain access, as well as seek to identify “new” target groups and “new” themes. For example the European Union is presently facing the common policy challenge of an increasingly ageing but healthy population. Any future programmes must ensure that older persons also have access to them, for example to transnational voluntary activity. At the same time however, it is important to ensure that access to those with a high educational attainment (where demand is currently very high) is not closed off. Instead, adequate resources must be channelled to the programmes.

That the programmes are well-resourced, inclusive and innovative is essential if the European Union is to become, by 2010 *“the most competitive, dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world based on sustainable economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.”*⁹

Finally, in order for programmes to remain flexible and respond to common policy challenges, it may be desirable to look at shorter programme review clauses so that they may be reviewed as and when necessary.

What have been the best and worst features of the programme so far? What elements would you like to see reinforced, introduced and what dropped? How can the programmes be made more user-friendly?

- The lump-sum payment system has made financial planning and accounting much easier and more transparent.
- CEV members have stressed the very complex, lengthy and bureaucratic nature of programmes. Procedures should be simplified significantly to foster wider interest and participation. They should also be transparent.

⁹ The strategic goal of the Union as adopted by Member States at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000.

- The European Voluntary Service Programme: the criteria on which the Commission approves expressions of interest from hosting organisations is not clear.
- Like to see introduced: programmes responding to more and different target groups.
- Finally, several members said they had not so far participated in programmes because a) they knew nothing about them and/or b) how to apply. Greater promotion of programmes at national level is needed.