

Information on Adult Education in Europe: InfoLetter¹

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FINANCING ADULT EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND THE NEED FOR INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS

All over Europe, almost all sectors are very strongly affected by the economic crisis and are still trying to regain stability. The field of education depends mostly on national funding that often has been cut due to the crisis. Against this background alternative sources of finance have to be found.

This problem was dealt with in an expert workshop in Brussels organised by the Directorate General Education and Culture. The workshop took place from 18th to 19th October and discussed ways of financing adult education in times of crisis – a topic that is relevant for the education sector in every Member State. The event brought together experts from the education sector, representatives of national governments responsible for education and experts from the financial sector.

In order to discuss ways of financing adult education underlying problems soon became clear: First of all the empirical evidence for costs and benefits of adult education is limited though financing adult education as a political question has to be based on reliable data and statistics on the outcomes of adult education in the different Member States. While the necessity of financing early education is hardly discussed, the benefits of adult education remain nebulous. Which are the costs for different levels of education, especially adult education? Which are the rates of return for financing adult education and could short-term benefits from adult education contribute to the long-term investment in early education?

¹ Information on Adult Education in Europe – InfoLetter je elektronski informativni servis evropske mreže „European InfoNet in Adult Education” koja je nastala u okviru Grundvig Programa za celoživotno obrazovanje Evropske komisije. InfoLetter izlazi dva puta mesečno i pruža informacije o obrazovanju odraslih u zemljama Evropske unije.

Beside the individual effect of adult education further positive results such as fiscal returns or social insurance contributions could be reviewed. Not to mention the risks of serious political problems resulting from failed formal education and training.

The central question of the discussion was who pays or should pay for adult education? Different national ways of dealing with this question were presented and analysed among them possibilities of self-financing, publicly financed and employer financed adult education. Currently training vouchers and learning account are the most applied instruments, in addition training loans, tax subsidies, savings plans or learning time accounts are used to finance adult education in different EU member states.

The discussion focussed on giving background data concerning European trends in adult education and tried to analyse their implication. Experts from different Member States described their experiences with financing instruments for adult education and make a contribution to the developments of concrete recommendations for policy and research. Little reliable information is available on effective financing of education on different administrative levels and by different sectors. In addition, the outcomes and efficiency of the sector remain hard to quantify.

The question of financing adult education was also discussed in the context of the Action Plan on Adult Learning: The DG is currently working on the way forward for the Action Plan on Adult Education that has been launched in 2008. The action plans aims at improving the quality and the efficiency of the adult education sector and ensuring an adequate investment in the adult learning sector. If the follow-up of the action plan shall comprise a concrete roadmap it has to be based on reliable data and statistics on adult education in Europe.

Marta Ferreira, Head of Unit for adult education stressed the importance of discussing financing opportunities for education as many governments tend to cut funding from the education sector facing the pressure of the financial crisis without considering the negative impacts and additional costs that will be caused by this. She pointed out that a coherent strategy for lifelong learning has to comprise the whole system from early to adult education. Although the results after ten years of Grundtvig are basically positive, the financial crisis and the difficulties of public funds imply negative impacts for the future of Grundtvig. Marta Ferreira asked to consider the involvement of private funds and other resources and to put forces together to ensure the future of adult education in Europe. However, more innovative concepts for financing adult education have to be established.