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Partnership and flexible pathways for lifelong skills development

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PARTNERSHIP AND FLEXIBLE PATHWAYS FOR LIFELONG SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR POLICY MAKERS

Strengthening partnership and flexibility is important for modernising education in Europe. The present Staff Working Document is part of a larger policy initiative: it accompanies and offers analytical support to the Commission's Communication on "Re-thinking Education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes". It is part of the European efforts to make lifelong learning a reality, and contributes to the objectives of Europe 2020. The findings presented build on analytical work carried out in cooperation with Member States and academic experts:

1. **Cooperation and partnership increase flexibility and relevance of learning and improve efficient use of resources.** They should be promoted across and between all levels of policy making and implementation (national, regional, local), between public and private actors, and in all contexts and forms of learning, in pre-primary education, schools, VET, higher education and adult learning.
2. **Effective partnerships and cooperation require strong and sustainable coordination structures and a shared vision among stakeholders.** They will often necessitate adapted funding mechanisms to take account of their specific decision making structures.
3. **Cooperation with social partners seems to work best where it is based on standing consultation mechanisms and sharing of responsibility between public and private actors.**
4. **Creating partnerships for funding can be effective,** such as sectoral training funds based on social partner agreements. This can mobilise private resources and share the costs of learning.
5. **Flexible pathways have an important potential for encouraging participation in lifelong learning** as they allow individuals to build upon prior learning, and link competences and qualifications gained across different phases and contexts of life – leisure and working life, inside and outside formal education and training.
6. **Such flexibility requires the removal of system-level barriers between different sub-sectors** (e.g. restricted progression from VET to higher education). The implementation of learning outcomes based approaches, guidance and transparency tools (EQF, NQFs, ECVET, EQAVET) is expected to clarify progression possibilities for individual learners. Further convergence between these EU tools would increase their benefit for end-users.
7. **This needs to be supported by the creation of structures that give easy access to integrated learning services.** New modes of delivery of learning content (e.g. modularisation of programmes, distance learning, evening classes, etc.) will attract new learners, and adapted funding mechanisms can provide incentives for institutions to develop such offers. In addition, institutions need to develop their internal lifelong

learning capacities, including abilities of staff to deal with non-traditional or adult-learners.

8. **Implementing strategies for groups of current non-learners require learner centred programmes and effective outreach strategies** (notably approaching disadvantaged groups in their social environment) aimed at raising their awareness of the available offer and its benefits, and motivating them. This includes easily accessible information and guidance. Learner-centred programmes should be delivered in settings relevant to learners' daily life, e.g. in the workplace or local community, etc., and with the support of employers, trade unions, NGOs and civil society organisations.
9. **Close cooperation with the voluntary and community sector** can be particularly crucial when it comes to attracting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups into learning and offering low-threshold and targeted support.

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of lifelong learning policies is lagging behind...

One of the key priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy¹ is to boost quality and resource-efficient education and training in a lifelong learning perspective. Too much of the EU's human capital remains undeveloped due to structural barriers and blind spots in learning provision. This concerns initial education and training of young people, notably the persisting lack of flexibility and transparency between different learning pathways, but even more severely it concerns adult learning which is stagnating in volume (9%), remaining far off the EU's 2020 target (15%).

Lifelong learning policies, understood as holistic approaches to link and validate all learning and facilitate skills development across lifetime, are considered paramount to address these challenges. The implementation of such policies is an explicit objective of the strategic framework ET 2020 and of the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs².

The 2012 Joint Progress Report of the Commission and the Council on the implementation of ET2020 showed that the majority of the European countries are still experiencing difficulties in integrating and interlinking different sectors of education and training.³ All analysis indicates that a lack of cross-sector policy cooperation remains evident in many countries. However, the promotion of the learning outcomes approach as a basis for progressive policy initiatives in this field is slowly gaining in both importance and influence.

...but boosting cooperation and partnerships can increase effectiveness...

This document intends to set the scene for such a shift by discussing effective forms for cooperation between several policy sectors, different stakeholders and providers of lifelong learning. It will examine how such collaboration can make education and training more relevant and generate important synergies in times of scarce public budgets. A partnership approach to lifelong learning is also key to make learning more flexible and connective, and more easily accessible for those who tend to participate less without support.

...and good practice from Member States can show the way.

In some Member States, e.g. Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden the implementation of lifelong learning policies and principles is already well advanced. This is demonstrated both through high rates of participation in learning including adult learning, as well as by the availability of instruments that increase the flexibility of learning pathways across different areas of the education and training system.

Evidence and examples of good practice presented in this SWD take stock of recent developments and highlight effective ways to develop partnership approaches and a flexible learning supply for more efficient education and training systems. The issues faced are

¹ See also Commission Communication COM(2012) 299

² Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020'), (2009/C 119/02); Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, COM (2010)681 final

³ 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (2012/C 70/05)

transversal and crucial for all levels of skills development (early childhood education and care, school education, VET, higher education, adult learning).

This SWD supports key messages within the ‘Rethinking Education’ Communication on how collaboration and partnerships can positively influence, guide and support the development and implementation of lifelong learning policies in Member States.

2. COORDINATION, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

Strong forms of cooperation maximise effectiveness and efficiency...

In order to boost growth and social cohesion and counter the effects of demographic change, a more prominent role for education and training in and across different governmental policies (economy, labour, fiscal policy, youth, social affairs, etc.) is demanded. For example, to increase the relevance of learning programmes for the labour market and to promote lifelong skills development at the work-place, close cooperation between different governmental actors and involvement of social partners is a key condition for success. And even more urgent in times of scarce public budgets, strong partnership is needed for sharing the cost of lifelong learning, achieving synergies and complementarity between different providers and to make the best use of available resources.⁴

...and education and training systems must adapt quickly to ensure that skills development meets the changing needs of individuals and employers.

However, in most EU countries, education and training policy is still organised mainly along the margins of sub-sectors with a vast array of stakeholders (public and private) at national, regional and local levels responsible for implementation of specific parts and aspects of lifelong learning.⁵ Another important barrier to effective lifelong learning policies is that education policies and welfare systems are still based on assumptions of an individual’s linear progression through education and employment which no longer correspond to the manifold trajectories people are facing nowadays.

The development of both effective coordination and strong partnerships across policy fields (education, employment, youth, social affairs etc.), levels of government (national/regional/local) and sectors (public, private/individual) thus seems crucial. In many Member States there is scope for better involving social partners, and also for the development of regional/local partnerships to improve skills development and ensure it is meeting the needs of individuals and employers.⁶

2.1 Coordination between highly segmented policy areas

Lifelong learning policies needs to link across and between policy areas...

⁴ See Agenda for New skills and Jobs, COM (2010)681 final

⁵ 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (2012/C 70/05)

⁶ 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) (2012/C 70/05)

There is broad agreement that a comprehensive policy approach on lifelong learning inevitably needs to *stretch across and link various policy areas*, notably:

- *Education and training policies*, providing both formal education and training and also an important share of non-formal learning;
- *Employment policies*, often entailing a training element but also defining the conditions under which an individual can receive unemployment and/or continuing training;
- *Social and health policies*, defining entitlement of specific target groups to support (including for education and training);
- *Fiscal and economic policies*, often including instruments to stimulate both employers' and individuals' investment in education and training.

...and across levels of governance...

Successful policies also require vertical coordination *across different levels of governance* in most Member States, since national, regional and/or local governments often share responsibilities for the design and implementation of relevant parts of lifelong learning policies, such as schools, adult learning⁷ or social services. This may include allocation and mobilisation of the necessary resources for learning from early childhood to post-retirement.

However, experience shows that lifelong learning strategies developed by Member States or Regions have sometimes lacked impact because insufficient emphasis was given to the involvement of stakeholders outside of the education sector.⁸

...and between education and training sub-sectors.

In addition to horizontal coordination between different policy sectors, *coordination between education and training sub-sectors* is another core condition for successful lifelong learning policies. For example, to support progression from VET to higher education there is, on the one hand, a need to ensure that VET equips people with the necessary competences to succeed in higher education, and on the other hand, that higher education programmes are not too narrowly designed and hence privilege people with certain profiles, competences and attitudes. Similarly, when validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning aim to lead to the same or equivalent qualifications as those awarded in the formal system it is important to ensure that the same level and quality of standards is respected in both systems.

⁷ Similar to trends in school governance, a number of countries have transferred responsibilities for adult learning policy to regional and local authorities in order to better respond to regional and local needs.

⁸ See e.g. Lifelong Learning 2010 research project (2007): *Patterns of Policy in Thirteen European Countries*, <http://lll2010.tlu.ee>; and Hungarian national report 2009 on the implementation of the "Education and training 2010" work programme http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learningpolicy/doc/natreport09/hungary_en.pdf

2.2 Dedicated coordination strategies and mechanisms

Stakeholders must be actively engaged for successful policy implementation...

Policies that rely on implementation by a large number of heterogeneous parties with divergent interests, identities and institutional missions, face important challenges when it comes to generating consensus and commitment to policy reform and/or implementation.

What may appear self-explanatory at first glance, is not always self-evident in terms of policy implementation. Based on the experiences of several Member States, research has highlighted the need for active stakeholder coordination and commitment as a basis for successful policy development and implementation.⁹ Weak communication and cooperation between stakeholders representing different relevant policy fields is a major source of policy failure. It can put at risk the relevance of learning offers (mismatches between skills provided by the education and training systems and those demanded by the labour market and society at large), lead to barriers for individuals' access to learning (non-connectivity between different sectors and forms of learning, lack of transparency of the various learning opportunities), and, last but not least, it can substantially limit the efficiency of investment as it bears the risk of duplication, excessive administrative burden, etc..

...and there must be clear consensus and shared responsibility...

Naturally, different groups of stakeholders have divergent and often competing interests in policy design and implementation, and in particular regarding spending priorities. Consequently, a lifelong learning strategy will only be effective when it is based on thorough coordination, i.e. negotiation, consensus building and development of clear agreements on sharing of responsibility between stakeholders. Key points to be taken into account are:

- A *clear division of responsibilities* among public authorities at different levels of governance.¹⁰ An increasing trend is for centralised authorities to focus on defining the strategic objectives and priorities, quality assurance, support (funding, guidance and good practice) and evaluation while actors on the ground design and implement the specific actions. Key challenges for such approaches are *quality assurance* as well as to promote the *mainstreaming of innovation* developed on the ground.
- To involve key stakeholders in both the *design* and *implementation* of measures, in order to secure information flow and long term commitment.
- To set up specific *coordination mechanisms* to rationalise strategic planning and funding decisions and to exchange information and good practices. To achieve this, a number of European governments have set up inter-ministerial task forces, inter-agency committees and various forms of education and training councils or skills councils.¹¹

Policy practice: Coordinating implementation of an overarching LLL strategy in Austria

⁹ Lifelong Learning 2010 research project (2007): *Patterns of Policy in Thirteen European Countries*, <http://lll2010.tlu.ee/>

¹⁰ Ibid pp. 95

¹¹ UNESCO (2010), *Global report on adult learning and education*, Hamburg: UIL

In July 2011 the Austrian government adopted its National Lifelong Learning Strategy "LLL:2020", which bridges education and training with the labour market and social issues. The **intensive consultation process** involved four federal ministries: education and training; science and research; labour and social affairs; economy, youth and families. It was inspired by EU-wide developments such as increased focus on learning outcomes, key competences, validation, etc. and helped to base the LLL:2020 strategy on a broad common understanding among stakeholders. Remarkably, for the first time the Austrian government has committed to reach agreed benchmarks on a number of LLL issues by 2020, which will be monitored and reported.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 1

2.3. Factors of success for partnerships between public and private actors

Non-governmental stakeholders need to be involved from the beginning...

While public authorities have a leading role in the design and implementation of lifelong learning policies this cannot be done effectively without involvement and cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders – notably employers, trade unions, learning providers, community and voluntary groups, and the individual learners. Creating mechanisms of cooperation and partnership between public and private sector organisations can support the *sharing of responsibilities for relevance, costs and benefits* of actions and programmes supporting lifelong learning.¹²

Such partnerships allow for pooling of financial and human resources, infrastructure and knowhow of various stakeholders and are considered "effective in supporting on-going education reform efforts and adding value to the activities and public images of partners"¹³.

...for the effective design and implementation of partnerships

Peer learning and large evaluations suggest that sustained partnership involvement is critical to the long-term success of initiatives. The following issues can be regarded as critical for effective stakeholder cooperation:¹⁴

- Successful partnerships *involve all strategic partners*, seek the early participation of the relevant co-founding agencies, and promote the concrete and active participation of partners, including representatives of target groups.
- Agreements on *concrete objectives and measures*. *Consultations* and *fora* are necessary to give stakeholders space to express opinions, but not sufficient to create

¹² The types of partnerships between public and private actors discussed in this SWD are generally understood as voluntary, non-contractual collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders in the education system mainly to support policy development, exchange of knowledge and sharing of resources.

¹³ Global Education Initiative (GEI) *Model of Effective Partnership Initiatives for Education*, World Economic Forum 2007

¹⁴ See summary report on EU peer learning seminar on critical factors for the implementation of lifelong learning policies, Vienna, 2010, <http://www.kslll.net/Documents/Summary%20report%20-%20seminar%20critical%20factors%20for%20LLL%20implementation.pdf>; and Global Education Initiative (GEI) *Model of Effective Partnership Initiatives for Education*, World Economic Forum 2007; Bernard Brunhes International, (2006), *EU-Wide Evaluation of the Community Initiative Equal 2000-2006*, Final Report, Volume 1.

commitment. Other actions, such as *pilot projects* are much more effective for testing the willingness of stakeholders to contribute.

- *A clear division of roles and competences and a clear identification of complementarities* among stakeholders representing different interests to reduce duplication and fragmentation.
- *Monitoring and evaluation* and considerations of *scale-up* and *mainstreaming* of activities are essential to ensure sustainability the long-term success of initiatives;
- Finally, the creation of partnerships and working with several stakeholders *requires sufficient funding* as it imposes certain *transaction costs*.
- The issue of the *optimal size of the partnerships* remains debated. While restricted partnerships (and partnerships with centralised decision making) can be regarded as more reactive, more manageable and hence more efficient, wide partnerships increase the potential for mainstreaming and sustainability.

Policy practice: "Learning and working" programme in the Netherlands

"Leren en werken", operational between 2005-2011, focused on coordinating the education and training and guidance provision in the area of adult learning with the labour market needs at regional level. The government decided to subsidise the contact and coordination among the relevant stakeholders - by setting up regional networks. Main success factors were:

- The *cross sectoral management of the programme* through a joint directorate set up by the two involved ministries (ministry of education and ministry for social affairs and employment).

- The importance of *leaving autonomy to the actors on the ground* to define their own objectives and actions.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 2

2.4 Different types of effective partnerships

The following section shows the main approaches and types of partnership building that have proved to be particularly effective for skills management, notably partnerships between public actors and social partner organisations, cooperation between learning institutions and businesses, and local multi stakeholder partnerships for LLL that give an important role to third sector organisations (NGOs).

Cooperation with social partners brings valuable benefits...

In addition to general considerations concerning stakeholder involvement, the contribution of social partners is particularly important to develop coherent and comprehensive skills and

lifelong learning policies. In particular, social partners support the design and implementation of such policies in many European countries by:¹⁵

- identifying needs for skills and qualifications needs and anticipating their development
- improving the recognition and validation of acquired skills;
- informing, supporting and providing guidance; and
- mobilising resources for skills development.

The degree of their involvement however varies greatly across European countries depending on their traditions and regulations regarding tripartite relations. In the case of continuing vocational education and training (CVET), the following four main forms of social partner cooperation can be found: direct consultation on policy setting, participation in formal consultative councils or advisory bodies, participation in VET coordination mechanisms, involvement in tripartite or public bodies. Despite these different traditions, successful modes of cooperation can be found in all countries.

For example, cooperation with social partners is considered a key factor in particular for *increasing the relevance of education and training and facilitating transitions* from school to VET and/or to work. In the Member States with strong dual VET systems the social partner organisations are given strong and *system-wide responsibility* for developing and revising training curricula (e.g. in Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany). A more detailed discussion on the role of social partners in the implementation of effective VET systems can be found in the Staff Working Document on Vocational training and education for better skills, growth and jobs.

Social partner cooperation also has proven beneficial for skills management in a more *sectoral* perspective, e.g. such as identification of future skill needs, developing skill strategies or getting advice on those training providers and programmes that meet given needs. Business organisations, chambers and professional bodies can pool their expertise in order to propose tools for tailor made analysis and comprehensive strategies.^{16 17}

Sector councils for employment and skills have been established in around half of the Member States, and sector skills issues are discussed in many Member States in transversal councils. Evidence reveals positive effects of such councils on sectors, enterprises, employees and employers.¹⁸

Trade unions also have an important role in supporting the learning of their members. For example union-led learning at work in the UK took on an important function through *Skills*

¹⁵ See Eurofound and CEDEFOP (2009), *Contribution of collective bargaining to continuing vocational training*, Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions; and "Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications" signed by the main European social partners in 2002, http://www.gencat.cat/diue/doc/doc_13227450_1.pdf.

¹⁶ See Ecorys (2010), *Sector Councils on Employment and Skills at EU level - A study into their feasibility and potential Impact*

¹⁷ Several examples exist in different countries where SME employers/owners are the target group for setting-up human resources strategies, such as in France (APCMA with COMAFOA) or in Germany (with Elbcampus

¹⁸ Ecorys (2010) *Sector Councils on Employment and Skills at EU level - A study into their feasibility and potential Impact*

for Life and has moved on to address skills at higher levels. Their experience shows that union involvement in workplace learning can increase the amount of training an employee receives. Where there is a union learning representative (ULR), 46.5 per cent of employees received five or more training days in the last 12 months compared to 29 per cent in workplaces where there is no ULR.¹⁹ In Finland a similar approach was designed in cooperation with trade unions to train mentors to stimulate continuing training.

Tripartite or bipartite dialogue has often led to the introduction of measures related to *training in collective agreements*.²⁰ In some countries, these measures have notably led to the creation of *(inter-) sectoral training funds*.²¹ Sectoral training funds are created on a voluntary basis, often under sectoral agreements, and are governed by bipartite bodies. These funds are generally financed by employers through (inter-) sectoral training levies, although several have received financial support from governments and the European Social Fund. Also employees are sometimes required to contribute to the financing through compulsory payroll contributions. Sectoral training funds appear to have several advantages, including the fostering of social dialogue and creation of a learning culture among employers and employees. From a funding point of view, they are successful in pooling substantial resources for training and avoiding uneven distribution of employer provided training.²² Sectoral training funds can improve the distribution of resources among groups of workers and types of organisations, e.g. large companies and SMEs.

A more detailed and comprehensive discussion on models that aim to stimulate private contributions, including partnership and collaboration approaches, to financing of continuing VET and adult learning can be found in the Staff Working Document on Vocational training and education for better skills.

Partnerships between individual learning institutions and the world of work are having a real impact on learning...

In addition to the system-wide and sectoral perspective, a growing number of partnerships between education and training institutions and the world of work are developed at the level of *individual institutions*. At school level their main objectives are often to improve learning and career guidance, teaching and learning of technical subjects and entrepreneurship education, and notably to facilitate the transition from school to work or school to VET. Notably in the VET sector partnerships between businesses and schools have a long tradition and are crucial for maintaining or increasing the relevance of training, including the competences of trainers. A more detailed discussion on partnerships in VET can be found in the Staff Working Document on Vocational training and education for better skills.

...while closer collaboration between higher education and business can bring real benefits (e.g. for funding) but must be more effectively implemented at policy level.

Furthermore, in the past few years increasing attention has been paid to developing ever closer collaboration between the *higher education sector and business*. Higher education is at

¹⁹ <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/files/publications/documents/211.pdf>

²⁰ For instance, see Eurofound (2009), *Contribution of collective bargaining to continuing vocational training*, Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

²¹ For instance, see CEDEFOP (2009), *Sectoral training funds in Europe*; European Commission (2007), *Employment in Europe 2007*.

²² Ibid

a cross-road in Europe; caught between shrinking state support and competition from the BRIC countries, a greater emphasis on the relevance and conversion value of education on the job market is needed as well as its full contribution to increasing Europe's innovation capacity.

Whilst business and industry involvement in the design and delivery of curricula and the identification of transferable skills and methods is increasingly accepted at a policy level the degree of implementation is still poor. In 2011 a comprehensive study on the *State of European University-Business Cooperation*²³ looked at the pros and cons of UBC and the various factors that affect it and which actions would encourage more UBC to take place. Thirty good practice case studies were also identified during the course of the study.²⁴ Alongside this European overview of the factors leading to or preventing UBC, another study was undertaken looking at fifteen institutional examples of successful UBC in greater depth.²⁵

Notably under the impact of fiscal consolidation needs, growing attention is devoted to the opportunities regarding additional funding which may arise from partnerships with business. E.g. in Germany a public programme (“Deutschlandstipendium”) introduced in 2011 awards grants to “high-performing” students (300 EUR monthly) under the condition that their universities raise private partner matching funding.²⁶

A 2011 study by the European University Association into the income flows into higher education institutions in Europe²⁷ found that funds from business can account for a significant share of institutional funding, but remain low in comparison to public funding in its various forms and student contributions (tuition or administrative fees). While consistent comparative data on funding streams to higher education is not available, the survey of institutions undertaken for the study found 6.5% of total funding to participating institutions coming from research contracts with the business and a further 4.1% from “service provision” (use of university services and resources to provide services to external parties). These average figures disguise a diversity of patterns and practices across EU Member States and institutions. Importantly, the scope for income generation from research contracts with business is clearly conditioned by the research intensity and activities of the institution in question.

As in other sectors of education, staff costs account for a high proportion of the operation costs of higher education institutions (between 60 and 90%)²⁸. Depending on the level of autonomy enjoyed by institutions, this places limits on institutions' margin of manoeuvre in budgetary management. However, efficiency efforts tend to focus on internal organisation (where streamlining structures can often increase efficiency) and cost-cutting through cooperation and partnerships. Examples in this respect include sharing equipment and services (such as IT) between institutions or providing previously internal services to external clients. To date, most notably owing to the specific status of higher education institutions in most countries, there appear to be limited examples of private sector expertise being used to

²³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/studies/munster_en.pdf

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/studies/munstercase_en.pdf

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/studies/technopolis_en.pdf

²⁶ <http://www.deutschland-stipendium.de>; Further Information on funding of higher education: EC, National Student Fee and Support System, 2011/12; see http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/fees_and_support.pdf

²⁷ EUA (2011) Financially Sustainable Universities II: Diversifying Income Streams

<http://www.eua.be/pubs/financially%20sustainable%20universities%20ii.pdf>

²⁸ Ibid

improve the governance and overall resource management of institutions of higher education. The scope for such learning from the private sector and the potential impacts need to be analysed in more detail.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships at regional and local level can improve skills provision...

In addition to the sectoral perspective on skills development, a number of European countries have also promoted a territorial approach. The concept of "learning regions" has been discussed, further developed and implemented across the EU. While the term may refer to large regions as well as to municipalities, villages or small scale communities, all share the underlying rationale of developing a geographical area by engaging in close cooperation the actors responsible for innovation, skills and economic development. With increasingly flexible and changing labour markets a growing focus is on effective management of learning provision in response to current and emerging regional skills needs.

...and local partnerships can support the engagement of demographic groups currently under-represented in lifelong learning

Against the backdrop of a shrinking workforce and higher skills needs, *local partnerships* also have an important role in engaging marginalised groups in higher levels of education and in up-skilling low qualified people to ensure their re-integration into the labour market and society. There is evidence that *engagement of voluntary community level organisations in lifelong learning partnerships*, especially those aimed at disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups of "non-learners", can be particularly effective. Cooperation with grass-roots NGOs can provide highly valuable knowledge about target groups.²⁹

Policy practice: How Sector Skills Councils function in the United Kingdom

Partially funded by the UK government Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations designed to build a skills system that is driven by employer demand with a view to enhance competitiveness of industries. SSC boards include representatives from employers, employees, education and training institutions, as well as government observers. There are currently 22 Sector Skills Councils covering over 90% of the economy and they all work towards the following four key goals: 1) reducing skills gaps and shortages; 2) improving productivity, business and public service performance; 3) increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce; 4) improving learning supply through National Occupational Standards, apprenticeships, and further and higher education. An evaluation of impacts of SSCs showed gains of between £100m and £130m a year from Government and Industry funding of £5m a year.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 3

Policy practice: The industry competence fund for paid training leave in Denmark

In Denmark in 2007 *CO-Industri* and *Dansk Industri* signed a new collective agreement allowing Danish workers to increase their right to paid continuing VET and to undertake a two-week paid vocational training course of their choice. The *Industriens Kompetencefonden*

²⁹ Bernard Brunhes International, (2006), *EU-wide Evaluation of the Community Initiative Equal 2000-2006*, Final Report, Volume 1.

(industry competence development fund) has been set up for this purpose. This industry competence development fund secures up to 85 % of employee salaries while they are training. The public sector pays salary compensation up to the level of unemployment benefit, whereas the competence development fund pays the difference between the unemployment benefit and the specified 85 %.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 4

Policy practice: Educational Partnerships between Schools and Companies in Baden Württemberg, Germany

In order to optimally prepare all pupils for their transition into working life, partners from the worlds of school and business decided to start the cooperation school-business partnerships in 2008. Every secondary school providing general education should establish and maintain at least one business partnership. Against this backdrop, the Government of the Land Baden-Württemberg, the Association of Chambers of Industry and Commerce, the Confederation of Skilled Crafts and the Union of Employers' Associations have decided to conclude an agreement on the establishment of partnerships. Since the first agreement of 2008 around 90% of all lower secondary schools have entered into contractual partnerships.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 5

Policy practice: Roadmap for employment – Academic Partnerships (REAP), Ireland

REAP is a collaborative project, involving eight Higher Education Institutional partners, for the research, development and validation of a Higher Education /Employment Partnership Model and Roadmap. It identifies learning needs within workplaces, draws up a comprehensive plan for partnership between employers and HEIs and verifies the effectiveness of the strategy through a diverse range of demonstrator collaborative activities.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 6

Policy practice: Local learning networks in Germany (Lernen vor Ort)

Lernen vor Ort is a national programme funding municipalities (60 Mio EUR, ESF supported, 2009-2014) supporting the setting up and operating of partnerships for a better local education and training systems. Knowhow on innovation in education management is provided by around 180 German foundations who are key partners of LvO. The broad objective of LvO is that municipalities put in place a well-functioning local education management based on a monitoring and reporting system and involving all relevant stakeholders.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 7

Policy practice: Community based access to further and higher education in Ireland

In Ireland a specific policy approach to community based access to further and higher education involves local community organisations, including third and private sector organisations, to engage with and support people from these target groups throughout their education, with a particular focus on bringing them up to tertiary level. Key elements of the

approach include stakeholder cooperation and communication, outreach to people, and support to learners, including financial support.
In detail see Annex, Policy example 8

2.5 Lessons learned from Partnerships

Cooperation and partnerships positively support the implementation of lifelong learning policies...

Cooperation and partnerships have proven beneficial to lifelong learning implementation with regard to numerous aspects: they have shown strong potential to promote better management of education and training and skills provision, increase flexibility and relevance of learning programmes, and improve efficient use of resources. Partnerships are also important for generating and disseminating innovation in learning provision.

...but must involve all relevant stakeholders, link all areas of lifelong learning, work across different policy areas and engage all levels of governance

Thus they should be promoted across and between all levels of administration and policy implementation, between public and private actors and in all contexts and forms of learning, in pre-primary education, schools, VET, higher education and adult learning. In particular, regional partnerships and cooperation shows strong potential for ensuring that skills development and provision is closely matched with citizens, learning institutions and the needs of the local economy.

...with a shared vision...

Effective partnership and cooperation require strong and sustainable coordination structures, a shared vision among stakeholders and often they necessitate adapted funding mechanisms to take account of their specific decision making structures.

...and the involvement of social partners from the beginning

In a number of Member States cooperation with the social partners is given high importance in design and implementation of lifelong learning policies, including learning provision, guidance and validation, thus underlining their key responsibility for effective skills management at national and notably regional or local levels, closest to the needs of individuals and society. Creating partnerships for funding, such as sectoral training funds based on social partner agreements, appear to be effective with a view to mobilising private resources and sharing the costs of learning.

Cooperation with social partners seems to work best where it is based on standing consultation mechanisms and shared responsibility between public and private actors.

...that can support the engagement of marginalised groups

While the role of non-governmental organisations in education and training provision may sometimes appear underestimated in the LLL debate, close cooperation with the voluntary and community sector seems particularly crucial when it comes to attracting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups into learning and offering low-threshold and targeted support.

...while collaboration between HEIs and business can support funding but has to be extended

On a theoretical level, increased cooperation between higher education institutions and business has a potentially positive impact on the overall levels of income into HEIs (as

additional private sector funds are brought in) and on the efficiency with which resources are used (as expertise in resource management from outside the world of higher education is transferred or exploited inside institutions).

3. FLEXIBILITY OF LEARNING PATHWAYS AND LEARNING OFFERS

System barriers must be tackled to make learning pathways more flexible...

Expanding flexible learning pathways is considered a key element of effective lifelong learning policy in the EU Member States.³⁰ Individuals should be able to move between different learning tracks (general education, VET and higher education), settings (formal, non-formal), and fields of studies with a view to horizontal and vertical progression to higher or new qualifications.

As a key principle, prior learning (independent of whether it was achieved through studies, work or in leisure) should be validated and recognised, as repeating learning content is a waste of time and discourages learner participation. The tackling of system level barriers (linked to the regulatory framework in a wide sense) therefore has to be a priority for national policy makers.

In all Member States learners are, at a certain level, tracked into different pathways, usually by setting conditions for access (typically for general and vocational education and training streams or between upper-secondary level and higher education). This early assignment to separate tracks potentially leads learners into dead-end streets where further vertical progression to higher qualifications levels may become difficult. This is primarily the case between vocational tracks and higher education and contributes to the generally lower prestige of vocational tracks in most Member States.

At the same time, flexibility of entry points needs to be combined with quality assurance of the certification of learning outcomes at the end of a specific learning process. This diversification of entry conditions to education and training programmes and diversification in modes of learning combined with clear 'exit' conditions (qualifications standards), means that education and training institutions have to re-think and adapt their approach towards learning and learners. Flexible pathways also imply a greater diversification of learners and require new capacities from staff and institutions.

...while barriers to learning for individuals must also be broken down

Finally, achieving more flexible pathways also requires measures to overcome barriers that are intrinsic to individuals, often linked to their socio-economic background and prior learning experience, and which, for manifold reasons, may keep them from making full use of their learning capacities.

3.1 Addressing system level barriers to flexibility of pathways

Conditions of access to different levels of education must not be barriers to progression...

Addressing barriers to progression from vocational qualifications to higher education has been paid relatively³¹ close attention in the past decade. Member States have developed various

³⁰ Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02), Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020, December 2010

³¹ GHK Consulting (2005): Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills and Early School Leavers; Cedefop (2010) *Guiding at risk youth through learning to work*

approaches to facilitate access from vocational education and training to higher education, notably with a view to increasing its attractiveness³²:

- Ensuring that a vocational pathway leads to a *qualification at a level equivalent to the general education pathways* which traditionally grant access to higher education. In many EU countries there are already such vocational pathways in place.
- ‘*Top-up*’ programmes to grant access to higher education also through vocational qualifications that are at a lower level than the general education upper- secondary leaving certificate (e.g. in Germany, Slovenia, Czech Republic or Slovakia)
- *Integrated models* whereby learners acquire a vocational qualification and at the same time prepare for a general education qualification (for example in Finland, Austria).
- *Recognition of work experience or other learning achievements* to grant higher education access to learners who do not provide over the required mainstream upper secondary certificate (e.g. in the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal and Spain)

What is crucial for all approaches to truly impact is to enable students to acquire a sufficient level of basic skills and general education already during their vocational education and training programme.

...and transparency instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework can support this

In addition, system level instruments such as *qualifications frameworks* are also expected to clarify progression possibilities for learners. As qualification levels are defined through the same categories of learning outcomes, without any reference to the institutional setting or the sub-sector of education and training, improving the permeability of education and training systems to aid transfer and progression is a key objective of national qualification frameworks in many countries³³. In the same perspective, most frameworks include or plan to include qualifications awarded outside the formal education and training systems³⁴. The indication on individual diploma and certificates of the level in the national and European qualification framework – the second phase, just now starting, of the EQF implementation – should draw attention away from the sector-based attitude and focus on the level of learning outcomes, thus supporting permeability.

An important boost to transitions between education and training sub-systems would also be obtained through the interoperability of European credit transfer and accumulation system in higher education (ECTS) and vocational training (ECVET). Equally helpful would be a common model of information supplement to qualifications across the education and training sub-systems, building upon the existing Diploma Supplement in higher education and Certificate Supplement in vocational training. Some convergence is already being applied

³² Ibid

³³ Cedefop (2012), Working paper No 12, *The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe. October 2011*, in particular pp. 15-16. Cf. European Parliament, 2012, *State of play of the European Qualifications Framework implementation*, in particular Section 4.5.1.

³⁴ Cedefop (2012), Working paper No 12, *The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe. October 2011*, in particular pp. 26-29.

with the use of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement (e.g. in Finland) and of personal information in the Certificate Supplement (e.g. in Slovenia).

It is vital to recognise and validate non-formal and informal learning...

For both vertical progression to higher levels and horizontal mobility between tracks, it is important that learning outcomes acquired previously are recognised.

The proposal for a Recommendation on the *validation of non-formal and informal learning* adopted by the Commission on 5 September 2012 has the objective to provide all citizens with the opportunity to have their skills validated and recognised for access to further learning or to the labour market. Currently, while some validation arrangements exist in all countries, the number of countries where system level approaches are developed and widely used is still small (e.g. Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal)³⁵. To date in many countries such mechanisms are rather limited to a specific sector of education and training (e.g. Germany, Spain, Luxembourg, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom), or broader approaches are still being developed.

...and member states can already provide good examples of where this is being done.

The countries with advanced methods and systems can be said to have ‘mainstreamed’ their approach by closely linking them to their national qualifications frameworks and the general certification approaches. An important factor for success seems to be to see validation as one out of several pathways to a qualification; it is important to avoid a situation where the outcomes of validation are seen as inferior to the qualifications acquired through traditional approaches (e.g. Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Portugal).

Learning credits can be an important tool in expanding learning pathways...

In addition, *schemes to recognise learning credits* are increasingly used to develop system-level pathways between different qualifications within a sub-system and qualifications sub-systems³⁶. Approaches developed in the Member States include:

- *Articulation of units between different qualifications at the same level/subsystem to enable progression.* For example, in France all upper-secondary vocational qualifications (at the same level/type) share the same core competences and general knowledge. Once a vocational qualification has been achieved a person can get recognition for this part of the qualification if they need to re-qualify in the future without additional assessment or learning. In Romania all vocational qualifications at a given level share units concerning key competences and all qualifications within an economic sector/field also share a number of units. In addition to offering flexibility for learners when it comes to progression, this approach offers some advantages for organisation of lifelong learning at institutional level (see below).
- *Diversifying the entry and exit points from a pathway.* Credit systems can be used to give people the possibility to enter a pathway with different achievements (by recognising credit from elsewhere) but also to leave at different levels with a

³⁵ GHK Consulting (2010) *Update to the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and informal learning: Synthesis*

³⁶ Cedefop (2010) *Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks*

qualification. Some countries (for example Denmark, Luxembourg, Hungary³⁷) are introducing the possibility for people who do not succeed in obtaining the full qualification to receive at least a partial qualification (which has relevance for the labour market and can be recognised if they return to education and training).

- *Stipulating in legislation the requirement for institutions to recognise relevant prior learning* (formal, non-formal or informal). For example, in Slovenia the obligation for VET providers to consider learners' credit for exemption is embedded in the legislation³⁸. In Finland the legislation on higher education stipulates that universities have to consider recognition of credit for learners who come from polytechnic institutions in view of entering a masters degree (depending on the polytechnics degree the university may require some additional learning or examination). In Slovenia and Ireland graduates of post-secondary non-tertiary education can sometimes enter directly into the second year of university education³⁹.

...and there are some difficulties of validation in higher education

The 2010 update of the inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning identified a very broad range of framework conditions for *validation in higher education*. Firstly there is a group of countries where validation in higher education is not possible. In other countries there is a limit on the volume of learning (in terms of credit or time) that can be recognised (in Germany for example validation can account for up to 50% of credit, in Hungary up to 30% and in Spain up to 15%). In only few countries individuals can acquire a full qualification based on validation of NFIL (France, Denmark, Iceland or Belgium Flanders).

Policy practice: Flexible pathways to higher education in Austria

Since 1997 vocational education and training students have had the possibility to obtain the professional baccalaureate (Berufsreifeprüfung or Berufsmatura). In 2008 the possibility to combine an apprenticeship with preparation for the professional baccalaureate (Lehre mit Matura) was introduced and preparatory courses made free of charge. In the academic year 2007/2009, 2 609 students received the professional baccalaureate certificate. 45% of these graduates started a university programme, 23% went to a Fachhochschule science, about 10% a university college of education and 20% a VET college.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 9

Policy practices in the field of validation

In **Portugal** specific infrastructure for validation was set up, namely the New Opportunities Centres (454 in total) where people could apply for validation and receive guidance, and the National Agency for Qualifications (in 2007) as the body responsible for both the coordination of the national validation system and for vocational training reform. The New

³⁷ ECOTEC (2008) *Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué: developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration*

³⁸ Cedefop (2010) *Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks*

³⁹ ECOTEC (2008) *Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué: developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration*; p.170

Opportunities Initiative has had significant reach: more than one million low qualified adults were encouraged to improve their educational attainment.⁴⁰

In **France** individuals can apply for validation by submitting a portfolio of experiences including detailed descriptions of skills and competences to the ministry responsible for awarding qualifications. An established jury appointed by the responsible ministry decides upon the award of a full or partial qualification based on the application.

In the **Netherlands**, individuals can apply for validation of experiences by submitting a portfolio of experiences to a recognised provider of "experience certificates". Assessors within these providers can deliver an experience certificate to be used either for job searching or for official recognition by an examination board of a formal education and training provider. The Dutch validation system is further supported by a knowledge centre which set up a quality code for validation that has to be respected by the providers of experience certificates.

In detail see Annex, Policy examples 10

Policy practice: NQF and credit system for flexible pathways in Slovenia⁴¹

Flexibility of pathways is developed in Slovenia by enabling people with lower level qualifications to have their credit recognised in view of higher level qualifications (mainly in VET). Equivalence between partial qualifications and units of qualifications is established when qualifications are designed. This enables learners who fail the full qualification to hold at least a partial qualification and it facilitates accumulation of a full VET qualification through validation.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 11

Policy practices of countries where system level conditions promote validation of NFIL in higher education

In **Estonia**, the 2003 University Act requires that universities accredit prior and experiential learning and obliges them to elaborate their own rules and procedures for recognition. The legal act Standard of Higher Education (*Kõrgharidusstandard*, updated in 2007) sets a very broad framework for common regulations for recognition of prior learning and states that all HEIs need to have such regulations within the institution.

In **Finland**, a set of 21 recommendations for universities and polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) regarding the validation of informal and non-formal learning have been prepared in 2009 by the Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. This set of recommendations covers various aspects of validation, from both the perspective of HEIs and students' perspectives and general recommendations for implementation.

In detail see Annex, Policy examples 12

⁴⁰ R. Carneiro (ed.) (2011), *Accreditation of prior learning as a lever for lifelong learning: lessons learnt from the New Opportunities Initiative, Portugal*, UNESCO, MENON Network, CEPCEP, http://www.ucp.pt/site/resources/documents/CEPCEP/Accreditation_final.pdf.

⁴¹ Source: Cedefop (2010) *Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks*

3.2 Making learning provision more flexible

Modularisation of learning programmes can support flexibility of learning...

Linear 'in-block' education and training programmes create certain difficulties for flexible provision as they make it rather difficult for people to enter into the programme at a different point than at the beginning, for instance following validation of prior learning or recognising credits from another institution.

One aspect of developing flexible learning at provider level is the *modularisation of programmes*. In Luxembourg, for example, the on-going reform of vocational education and training combines the development of a competence based approach to programmes and qualifications with a modular system. The new approach to vocational education and training programmes and qualifications improves the combination of work-placed and school-based learning. For the individual it means that persons who fail in a particular module of their training scheme only need to sit that particular module again⁴².

Another approach to diversification of flexible provision is by *combining education with on-the-job learning*. While dual VET has a long-standing tradition in a number of EU countries (notably DE, AT, NL, DK) *dual tertiary VET*, i.e. alternance of in company learning and tertiary studies, is a rather recent phenomenon. A detailed discussion of work based learning and dual forms of training can be found in the SWD on Vocational training and education for better skills

...as can opening up education through the use of ICT and open educational resources

Distance learning has traditionally played a relevant role in improving access to education and training for people with time constraints or limited financial means and in remote areas. It is also very developed in the area of continuing education, especially within companies.

However, as a consequence of the ICT revolution over the last few years there has also been an exponential growth in educational courses and other resources available via the Internet, either free as Open Educational Resources (OER)⁴³ or paid-for educational content. In the field of education, the so-called "Open Educational Resources Movement" and other public and private initiatives are promoting the use of ICT for less barriers to education and more flexible and creative ways of learning, characterised by collaboration, bottom-up practices (both in traditional and new channels and markets) and where the user is also a creator of learning content.

Basic skills training can effectively be offered in the workplace...

The time and space available to adults is a key factor but also a scarce commodity. As most adults cite learning for work as a priority, it is important that organisations are willing to respond to this by adjusting work plans and schedules and being flexible in how work is organised to allow time for learning. Since the majority of the low-skilled population in the European Union is active in the labour market, the workplace is a key setting where low-skilled individuals can participate in structured learning and basic skills training.

⁴² P. Thill (2010) *EEO Review: Youth Employment Measures, 2010. Luxembourg Report*

⁴³ OER, as defined by UNESCO in 2002, are teaching, learning or research materials that are in the public domain or released with an intellectual property license that allows for free use, adaptation, and distribution.

For example, in Norway, adult education is a well-developed sector with a nation-wide network of adult education centres run by the municipalities. The *Norwegian “Education Strategy”* has a set of mechanisms that facilitate adults in gaining qualifications, namely: a statutory right; study leave; validation of prior learning; financial support in the form of loans and scholarships; flexibility; national primary and secondary school curricula. Yet, participation among vulnerable groups remained a problem and it was decided to take learning out to the workplace, where many of them are to be found.

...as basic skills training can be embedded into a wide range of other learning offers.

Another successful method of flexible provision, notably for low-skilled workers, is ‘*embedded learning*’. Research suggests that people with inadequate basic skills are often hesitant to take literacy, numeracy or language training; they are more likely, though, to take the same training if it is part of a course of their choice. Embedding basic skills with other types of learning gives the opportunity for individual learners to find themselves the benefits of improving their basic skills. It has been found that 15% more people stay on embedded courses than stand-alone basic skills courses and that there is a higher achievement rate among those learning⁴⁴.

For young adults who have left school early, combining basic skills and VET has been shown to improve qualification rates as well as providing basic skills. Tutors from general education and vocational tutors must work closely together to develop and deliver such programmes, be they inside or outside the workplace. Basic skills at the workplace will always need the professional competence of teachers and trainers.

Policy practices in the field of Modularisation

Modularisation for more flexible learning in Lithuania

In 2007 the Lithuanian government introduced a revised Law on vocational education with a modularised structure of qualifications whereby content is regulated by individual guidelines for higher education study fields and professional standards. According to the Law, a module in vocational training is a self-contained teaching and learning unit, leading from a defined input level of the learner to a competence increase planned in advance. Modularisation has been taken forward to introduce more flexibility and greater opportunities for lifelong learning.

Structuring initial VET in units and modules in Luxembourg

The 2008 Law for reforming VET focuses on reorienting IVET towards a modular and competence-oriented structure. All vocational training is structured into learning units which can be accumulated. The development from qualification to curricula is based on a four step approach: the definition of professional profile (Berufsprofil) includes working areas/domains, assignments and tasks; the development of training profiles (Ausbildungsprofil) to which competences are associated; the training profiles are structured into framework curricula (*Rahmenlehrpläne*) which includes units or modules; the framework curricula build the basis for developing assessment and curricula.

In detail see Annex, Policy examples 13

⁴⁴ E.g. Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) (2008), *Skills for Life: Progress in Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy*, HC 482 Session 2007-2008

Policy practice: Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life, Norway

The Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life (BCWL) was introduced to fund and support basic learning projects in enterprises that prevent the exclusion of low-skilled people from work, or projects aiming at preparing people for working life in co-operation with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. The programme requires close co-operation with employers who agree to the provision of basic skills in the workplace in return for financial compensation for workers' time spent on structured learning.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 14

3.3 Promoting openness of institutions to flexible learning

The capacity to deliver flexible learning must be expanded by developing the ability and readiness of existing learning providers...

In addition to institutional aspects that concern the delivery of flexible learning, the development of open pathways also depends on *organisational capacities of learning providers* such as:

- Readiness and preparation of staff to work with diversified groups of learners.
- The role of leadership in driving the development of the LLL agenda and flexible pathways within an institution and keeping it high on the agenda. As in any change management process strong and convinced leadership is a supportive element for motivating staff towards implementation of change and innovation.

...and adapting funding mechanisms to stimulate institutional flexibility...

Mechanisms for the funding of learning can pose further system level barriers to flexible learning pathways. Under certain conditions, funding mechanisms may discourage providers from recognising credit and non-formal and informal learning (e.g. if funding is provided per taught hours) and they can also discourage individuals from participation (e.g. if through returning to education and training learners lose unemployment benefits).

The concept of flexible pathways inevitably challenges established funding methods in education and training which were designed to fit the model of linear learning trajectories (public funding is often based on per-capita yearly basis or per hours taught). This model can create situations where providers have disincentives to provide flexible pathways to their learners in order to safeguard funding streams. For example, for higher education programmes in a number of countries (e.g. Portugal, Norway, Finland) validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in view of exemption is free of charge for the individual, but no financial incentive is provided for the higher education institution. This requires innovative solutions to overcome obstacles and financial incentives to encourage promotion of flexible pathways.

Project based funding can also be considered as giving providers flexibility to adjust to the needs of a range of target groups. However, project based funding is typically a one-off source of revenues and it therefore caters for the creation and early implementation of innovative measures but it does not provide sustainable sources of funding.

... with services integrated and working together to support learning, especially guidance

To allow individuals take advantage of the range of opportunities for the development and recognition of skills made available by lifelong learning policies, effective provision of guidance is a necessity. Citizens need support in planning their individual learning pathways to acquire the right mix of skills that will enable them to access further learning or the labour market. They need support in the identification, documentation and validation of the skills and competences that they have already developed through study, work, volunteering, leisure and life experience. Integrated guidance services need to be able to accompany citizens to both plan voluntary transitions and tackle external changes. The more education and training systems become open and flexible, the more crucial guidance becomes to help citizens reap the benefits of such programmes.

Policy practice: Turning a university into a lifelong learning centre - University of Graz/Austria

The University implemented its lifelong learning strategy within several steps including research on the state of LLL within the university, on models of lifelong learning in universities and by consulting internal stakeholders. As a key result of the strategy development a *Centre for Continuing Education* was established, which is in charge of developing and promoting education and training activities and programmes of interest to the general public.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 15

Policy practice: Adapted funding solutions to support flexible learning pathways

In **Denmark**, Higher education institutions are paid a one-off taximeter funding if the competence assessment to enter higher education results in an exemption of at least 15% of the study programme.

In **Belgium/Flanders**, the funding model for higher education, introduced in 2008, includes multi-annual agreements between the minister and each higher education institution setting out agreed objectives and targets and the commitment of the institution to deliver on them and the amount of funding involved. The performance agreements include objectives aimed at widening participation and incentives for the institutions to support achievement and success of students from more vulnerable backgrounds, from ethnic minorities, students with a disability, or students who are already in work.

In **Finland** a performance based funding system has been introduced to support the VET reform in view of competence-based and individualised provision. The main indicators for the performance based funding are employment after graduation, proportion of students completing their programmes and students continuing on to further studies.

In detail see Annex, Policy examples 16

Policy practice: National Plan on Adult Education in Slovenia

Slovenia developed and established an Adult Education Plan. Key features are: holistic access and the connectedness of all forms of learning; diversity and flexibility of learning offers; key competences and learning for personal growth, work and the development of society; possibilities for the recognition and validation of learning; appropriate information and

guidance infrastructure. The network of fourteen lifelong learning centres in Slovenia is central in the achievement of improved quality and effectiveness of education and training systems.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 17

3.4 Tackling barriers at individual level

Improved flexibility of pathways and removal of structural barriers is a pre-condition for increased take up, but not sufficient in itself to make people progress to new fields or higher levels of learning. The reasons why people opt for a specific pathway can only partially be influenced by the education and training offer. Aspects such as attitudes towards a certain type of education, the self-perception of their capacities, and notably the behaviour of their peers influence, to a large extent, the choices individuals make. People's choices are rarely linear and affected by their interests, prior experience, their aspirations or the guidance they receive⁴⁵.

For example, in France the success rate of students holding the vocational upper-secondary leaving certificate (*Baccalaureat Professionnel*) in achieving a Bachelor degree is 20 percentage points below the success rate of people who hold the general education qualification (this figure does not take into account those who drop out during their studies and many drop out in the first year in fact)⁴⁶. The indication of EQF levels on individual diplomas and certificates should have a positive impact on attitudes and self-confidence, helping people to perceive progression as separate from institutional considerations and more confidently plan personal learning pathways.

Integrated approaches show good results...

Increasing use of flexible pathways requires approaches that combine more flexible offers with measures for outreach to non-traditional learners, targeted (financial) support to individuals and institutional capacity building, and, crucially, adequate lifelong guidance.⁴⁷

Research and analysis of practice⁴⁸ show that *for vulnerable groups learning is usually not the only problem*. They tend to have multiple problems: social, financial, health and others, as well as learning needs, which are best addressed in a holistic way, and in partnership with relevant agents. Addressing their skills needs may require a joined-up solution which addresses a combination of learning and other challenges such as housing, unemployment, etc. In general, they are "non-learners" who have been alienated and deterred from education and training through failure, disaffection, disappointment with the initial systems, social and financial constraints, etc., and as a result their confidence in themselves and their abilities are low. Their disengagement with learning means that they will not come looking; learning must

⁴⁵ ECOTEC (2008) *Beyond the Maastricht Communiqué: developments in the opening up of VET pathways and the role of VET in labour market integration*

⁴⁶ Quérés et al (2010) *Repères et références statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche - édition 2010*

⁴⁷ See e.g. ECORYS (2012) *Evaluation of the ESF support to Lifelong Learning*, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7922&langId=en>

⁴⁸ See e.g. P. Federighi et al (2009) *Enabling the low-skilled to take their qualifications "one Step Up" - final report and inventory*; GHK (2010) *Basic skills provision for adults: policy and practice guidelines* http://www.kslll.net/Documents/ALWG_Basic%20skills%20guidelines_final%20report.pdf

be brought to them in settings which are meaningful to their lives and work and socio-cultural context. Also voluntary and community organisations, as well as cultural and creative sector organisations, can play a powerful role in engaging vulnerable groups back into learning. Motivating them will also require raising their awareness of the personal benefits of learning and improving their competences.

The European Guide⁴⁹: *Strategies for improving participation in and awareness of adult learning* is rich in examples of how countries are effectively designing awareness campaigns and reaching vulnerable target groups. *Outreach and awareness raising* should be followed up promptly by *guidance* to provide information on the learning offer and to develop individual learning plans. For many who have gained extensive experience and non-formal and informal learning, *validation of outcomes of their prior learning and experience* should be the basis for developing their individual plans. Once their interest has been stimulated, learning opportunities should follow immediately. However, they will not and should not be attracted back to the same institutions and programmes of which they dropped out or failed at.

...with a focus on raising aspiration and changing stereotypes...

When aiming to tackle a negative cycle of under-achievement in education and competences in a community, it is important to *raise or change young people's aspirations*. This also matters for example for breaking gender stereotypes in choice of learning pathways and career pathways⁵⁰. Lack of progression towards higher levels among disadvantaged groups is also linked to the low aspirations that education and training staff tend to have of them and their future learning careers. There is evidence that positive aspirations of teachers for their students are related to students' success⁵¹. Other approaches that appear effective are: mentoring, support by peers and positive examples, empowering learning approaches.

...an including adaptation of learning methods to the needs of target groups...

The approaches used for second chance learners should be *learner-centred*, and related to work and daily life, based on less formal, blended and embedded methods. *Persistence* is an issue as these people have full and often complex personal and family lives competing for their time and attention. Flexible programmes that they can dip in and out of are therefore suitable. Modules and units of content will help their progression and re-entry.

It is not enough to simply attract these groups into learning, they must also have real opportunities to progress and raise their level of qualification. This needs *formative assessment approaches* to sum up their achievements but more importantly to help the learning process and identify specific needs and adapt teaching accordingly.

There is likely to be a wide digital gap between most vulnerable groups and mainstream citizens. *Developing their ICT skills* will broaden their learning opportunities by giving them access to Internet and social media, but also distance learning and OER, as well as enhance their basic skills.

⁴⁹ European Commission, 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2012/adult_en.pdf

⁵⁰ See e.g. Ofsted (2011) *Girls' career aspirations*

⁵¹ See e.g. Ofsted (2011) *Removing barriers to literacy*, which cites teachers' aspirations for students as a key factor in their success in developing literacy skills

Policy practice: System level measures to support equity of access to higher education in Ireland

In 2008 the Irish Higher education authority defined a strategy to strengthen the access of people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education including a range of actions e.g. Building capacity through a range of supports, including continuing professional development, practitioner workshops and seminars through the Strategic Innovation Fund.
In detail see Annex, Policy example 18

Policy practice: Competence agencies ('Kompetenzagenturen') in Germany

Competence agencies in over 200 locations in Germany aim at the social and professional integration of disadvantaged young people (for example young people having left school without qualifications, long term unemployed, people facing family difficulties or those in debt and at improving their transition from school to work. The initiative focuses on encouraging them to reflect on their own skills and competences and empower them to develop these.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 19

Policy practice: Effective practice in raising aspirations of young people – UK England

Effective practice in **raising aspirations of young people was identified in the UK/England** and highlighted the importance of several aspects, including: engagement with young people at an earlier stage and at key transition points, alternative offers to mainstream schooling, use of mentors, role models and peer support, advice and guidance, empowering etc.

In detail see Annex, Policy example 20

3.5 Lessons learned from Flexible Pathways and Learning Offers

Flexible pathways are vital for participation...

Evidence suggests that flexible pathways have important potential for encouraging participation in lifelong learning as they allow individuals to build upon prior learning and link their competences and qualifications gained across different phases and contexts of life – leisure and working life, inside and outside formal education and training.

...and barriers must be removed as both system and individual levels

While removing system-level barriers between different sub-sectors (e.g. restricted progression from VET to higher education) is a precondition for flexible pathways, this is not sufficient in itself.

EU transparency instruments can support flexibility...

The implementation of learning outcomes based approaches and transparency tools (EQF, NQFs, ECVET, EQARF) is expected to clarify progression possibilities for individual learners. This needs to be supported by the establishment of structures that give easy access to integrated learning services, including guidance and validation of prior-learning in order to effectively support learners who are willing and motivated to follow such paths.

...alongside changes in the way education and training is delivered and funded

Flexible pathways also require more flexible learning offers including new modes of delivery of learning content (e.g. modularisation of programmes, distance learning, evening classes, etc.) and adapted funding mechanisms to provide incentives for institutions to develop such offers. In addition, institutions need to develop their internal lifelong learning capacities, including abilities of staff to deal with non-traditional or adult-learners.

...and a focus on raising aspiration especially of disadvantaged groups

This needs to be coupled with measures to promote the educational aspirations of disadvantaged groups, including through guidance, mentoring and targeted support.

ANNEX - EXAMPLES OF POLICY PRACTICE

Policy example 1: Coordinating implementation of an overarching LLL strategy in Austria

After several years of development and stakeholder consultation, in July 2011 the Austrian government adopted its National Lifelong Learning Strategy "LLL:2020", which bridges education and training with labour market and social issues. It identifies 10 areas of priority and a total of 73 measures. The **intensive consultation process**, inspired by EU-wide developments such as increased focus on learning outcomes, key competences, validation, etc. helped to base the LLL:2020 strategy on a broad common understanding among stakeholders about the principles and objectives of LLL.

For the implementation process of the strategy, a *National Task Force for Lifelong Learning* brought together four federal ministries covering the areas education and training; science and research; labour and social affairs; economy, youth and families. A *National Platform for Lifelong Learning* with an advisory and monitoring function has also been established, representing all relevant stakeholders i.e. other federal ministries and governmental agencies such as PES, the social partners, the regions and communes, universities, researchers, NGOs etc.

Remarkably, for the first time the Austrian government has committed to reach agreed benchmarks on a number of LLL issues by 2020. To monitor this, a yearly implementation report is submitted to the federal council of ministers to analyse developments and progress as well as identify obstacles and under-performance. A final report will be submitted in Autumn 2020.

Source: "LLL:2020: Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich"/ : http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/20916/lll-arbeitspapier_ebook_gross.pdf

Policy example 2: "Learning and working" programme in the Netherlands

"Leren en werken", operational between 2005-2011, focused on coordinating the education and training and guidance provision in the area of adult learning with the labour market needs at regional level. The main principle behind the national funding programme presented was that the government decided to subsidise not specific programmes organised by the involved stakeholders (these are funded through other sources) but the contact and coordination among them. By setting up regional networks, the stakeholders can mutualise their activities and reach common objectives more effectively. These success factors were highlighted:

- The *cross sectoral management of the programme* through a joint directorate set up by the two involved ministries (ministry of education and ministry for social affairs and employment) helped to overcome sectoral thinking and strengthened commitment.

- The importance of *leaving autonomy to the actors on the ground* to define their own objectives and actions: the funded networks needed to have clear objectives which had to be agreed among the partners;
- The *new role of the government as a “partner” and a provider of a service* going beyond the usual functions of subsidiser and controller (the civil servants in charge of the programme went directly to the regions, on a frequent basis, and “recruited” partners for these networks and advised them on their actions);
- The stimulation of commitment through co-funding requirements: The networks had to provide 25% of the funding – this can be in the form of human resources rather than budget.

Source: Summary report of the EU peer learning seminar on critical factors for the implementation of LLL strategies (2010), <http://www.kslll.net/Documents/Summary%20report%20%20seminar%20critical%20factors%20for%20LLL%20implementat ion.pdf>; see full case study GHK (2010)⁵², http://ec.europa.eu/education/moreinformation/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 160

Policy example 3: How Sector Skills Councils function in the United Kingdom

Partially funded by the UK government Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations designed to build a skills system that is driven by employer demand with a view to enhance competitiveness of industries. SSC boards include representatives from employers, employees, education and training institutions, as well as government observers. There are currently 22 Sector Skills Councils covering over 90% of the economy and they all work towards the following four key goals:

1) reducing skills gaps and shortages; 2) improving productivity, business and public service performance; 3) increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce; 4) improving learning supply through National Occupational Standards, apprenticeships, and further and higher education.

The main rationale for the sector skills councils is to *create platforms which bring together employers representatives, employees’ representatives and the education and training sector* to continuously ensure that training provision is up-to date and responsive to labour market needs. The role of these councils is to support information exchange and common decisions about themes outlined above and to be proactive in developing actions in the areas of education and training. This includes: working with employers to identify future skills needs; developing skills and training solutions; setting occupational standards; influencing and shaping the future development of qualifications; designing apprenticeship frameworks; encouraging greater investment in training; providing labour market information that assists in long-term business planning.

Their performance was evaluated in 2009/2010. 22 of the 25 Sector Skills Councils were successfully relicensed. An evaluation of impacts of SSCs showed gains of between £100m and £130m a year from Government and Industry funding of £5m a year.

⁵² GHK Consulting (2010), *Lifelong Learning Strategies – Critical factors and good practice in implementation* (analytical report commissioned by DG Education and Culture under framework contract EAC 19/06)

Sources: <http://www.ukces.org.uk/sector-skills-councils/>; <http://www.sscalliance.org/Home-Public/SectorSkillsCouncils/SectorSkillsCouncils.aspx>

Baker Tilly (2010): Alliance of Sector Skills Councils. Evaluating economic impact

Policy example 4: The industry competence fund for paid training leave in Denmark

In Denmark in 2007 *CO-Industri* and *Dansk Industri* signed a new collective agreement allowing Danish workers to increase their right to paid continuing VET and to undertake a two-week paid vocational training course of their choice. The *Industriens Kompetencefonden* (industry competence development fund) has been set up for this purpose, starting activities in January 2009 and intended to coexist with the industry training fund. The competence development fund is expected to change the traditional Danish STF model. The rationale behind this competence development fund is the matter of delocalisation; there is a need for employees to get relevant skills and competences in new sectors/jobs before their transfer to other areas of the world. In the present Danish CVET system, the employee has to agree on training activities with the manager/employer, which makes it difficult for employees to train in competences for a different job in a different sector. Therefore, the idea was to set up a more flexible and proactive CVET system intended to facilitate training for other jobs/sectors. This industry competence development fund secures up to 85 % of employee salaries while they are training. The public sector pays salary compensation up to the level of unemployment benefit, whereas the competence development fund pays the difference between the unemployment benefit and the specified 85 %.

Source: *Cedefop (2008), Sectoral training funds in Europe, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/Files/5189_EN.PDF, p. 43*

Policy example 5: Educational Partnerships between Schools and Companies in Baden Württemberg/Germany

In order to optimally prepare all pupils for their transition into working life, partners from the worlds of school and business decided in 2012 to renew their cooperation on school-business partnerships, which started in 2008.

Every secondary school providing general education should establish and maintain at least one business partnership. Such cooperation can also be formed with a network of several companies and with vocational training institutions. Partnerships enable schools to use a more in-depth and defined approach in their work concerning the requirements and demands of working life and give companies the chance to prepare themselves for their future members of staff and contribute towards the provision of knowledge concerning complex business contexts.

Against this background, the Government of the Land Baden-Württemberg, the Association of Chambers of Industry and Commerce, the Confederation of Skilled Crafts and the Union of Employers' Associations have decided to conclude an agreement on the establishment of partnerships. Since the first agreement of 2008 around 90% of all lower secondary schools

have entered into contractual partnerships with one or several companies (some schools have up to 20 partners), involving around 3.500 enterprises throughout the region.

Sources: Earllall 2012, "One step ahead" project, Baden-Württemberg report http://www.mutual-learning.eu/documenti/en/pub_w_40.pdf and <http://www.kultusportal-bw.de/servlet/PB/menu/1241669/>

Policy example 6: Roadmap for employment – Academic Partnerships (REAP), Ireland

REAP is a collaborative project, involving eight Higher Education Institutional partners, for the research, development and validation of a Higher Education /Employment Partnership Model and Roadmap. It has been developed in response to the Irish National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, which identified one of two key areas for action in labour force development as: “*Ensuring the development of a high-skilled, adaptable workforce through continued emphasis on lifelong learning and training of those in employment.*” as a key area, which can best be achieved by coherent, consistent and well developed tripartite relationships between Learners, Employers and Higher Education Institutions.

The strategy for the REAP project is based on an initial analysis on the learning needs of workplace sectors, followed by partnership model development. The initial learning need-analysis strand has key actions including a review of employers, learning needs and partnership approaches, and regional and sectoral research. The partnership model development activity has three key strands: implementation and validation, integration and dissemination aimed at establishing a framework of employer, and HEI collaboration based on specific activities and context. The REAP project adopted a ‘trial implementation approach’ specifically delivering demonstration programmes in specialist targeted courses, co-operative placements, academics and researchers into the workplace, professional postgraduate programmes, and industry into academia.

Source: Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre (2011), 30 best case studies of good practice in the area of UBC within Europe; Full case study accessible at http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/studies/munstercase_en.pdf

Policy example 7: Local learning networks in Germany (Lernen vor Ort)

Lernen vor Ort is a national funding programme (60 Mio EUR, ESF supported, 2009-2014) supporting the setting up and operating of partnerships for a better local education and training systems. The programme tries to address the lack of long term vision at the local level shared by stakeholders active in the educational field. The types of stakeholders concerned are: relevant public administration departments at the local, regional and national levels; public providers; for profit and not for profit private providers; social partners; enterprises; and associations. Currently, each stakeholder is responsible for a fragment of the lifelong

learning provision, but the role of the different institutions is not always clearly defined and overlaps exist. This makes the learning offer hard to understand for both individuals and policy-makers, and undermines vertical and horizontal permeability, especially for those who have fewer resources to find and process the relevant information. The complexity of provision is combined with a lack of coordination, making it difficult to ensure the offer as a whole matches needs of the labour market.

The design of Lernen vor Ort draws on the lessons learnt during the implementation phase of the previous ‘Learning Regions’ program¹¹⁴. The main lesson learnt is that for a strategic vision to be implemented successfully, it has to be anchored in a *permanent structure, close to the people, with a mandate, decision-making power and financing capacity, such as a municipality*.

The broad objective of LvO is that municipalities put in place a well-functioning local education management based on a monitoring and reporting system and involving all relevant stakeholders. Municipalities should get a good overview of who is doing what in education and training, and undertake a coordination function to make sure each actor is pursuing the same objectives, defined collectively, on the basis of quantitative information provided by a monitoring system. Special attention needs to be given to the smooth management of pathway transitions and efficiency of guidance and counselling.

Knowhow on innovation in education management is provided by around 180 German foundations who are key partners of LvO.

Sources: <http://www.lernen-vor-ort.info>; and case study by GHK (2010), http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 129

Policy example 8: Community based access to further and higher education in Ireland

Community-based access to further and higher education is an approach developed as from 2000 and aimed at increasing participation in tertiary education of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The approach involves local community organisations, including third and private sector organisations, to engage with and support people from these target groups throughout their education, with a particular focus on bringing them up to tertiary level. Key elements of the approach include stakeholder cooperation and communication, outreach to people, and support to learners, including financial.

The approach has been put into practice in various programmes, most notably the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantaged (2001-2010). The Fund operated as part of a broad continuum of work being done by partnerships/local development communities. This work, which covered a spectrum from pre-primary school education through to mature students, was considered critical in raising the aspirations of learners within the local community.

The fact that community-based organisations managed the Millennium Partnership Fund was seen as vital in successful delivery. It engendered trust with learners from the local communities involved. It also allowed local consortia to be created, e.g. in Cork City and county where the local organisations in receipt of the Millennium Partnership monies worked

with University College Cork, Cork Institute of Technology and six local further education colleges.

A variety of ways of raising aspirations were developed including visits to the local tertiary educational institutions for school children, including Easter or summer camps; homework clubs run by universities; more focussed mentoring and tuition; parents' programmes to explain to the advantages of tertiary education. Thus action addressed also the wider environment of individuals.

Source: GHK (2010) case study, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 151

Policy example 9: Flexible pathways to higher education in Austria

Since 1997 vocational education and training students have had the possibility to obtain the professional baccalaureate (Berufsreifeprüfung or Berufsmatura) and in 2008 the possibility to combine an apprenticeship with preparation for the professional baccalaureate (Lehre mit Matura) was introduced and preparatory courses made free of charge. In the academic year 2007/2009, 2 609 students received the professional baccalaureate certificate, about 2.7% of the comparable age cohort (Klimmer, Schlögl and Neubauer, 2009). 45% of these graduates start a university programme, 23% go to a Fachhochschule science, about 10% a university college of education and 20% a VET college (Klimmer et al., 2009). Good general education is a pre-requisite for students to enrol in higher education, including tertiary education at university and Fachhochschule, and the option to move into higher education is not only valuable in itself, it also directly confers status on VET programmes.

Source: OECD (2010) Learning for Jobs – OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training – Austria, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/45407970.pdf>

Policy examples 10:

In **Portugal** a specific infrastructure for validation was set up, namely the New Opportunities Centres (NOC, 454 in total) where people could apply for validation and receive guidance, and the National Agency for Qualifications (in 2007) as the responsible body responsible for both the coordination of the national validation system and for vocational training reform. The New Opportunities Initiative has had significant outreach: more than one million low qualified adults were encouraged to improve their educational attainment

The New Opportunities Initiative (NOI) was officially announced and launched in December 2005. NOI is a vast public sponsored programme contemplating Accreditation of prior learning (APL), Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and adult education, targeted at the entire Portuguese low-skilled adult population (estimated at around 72% of the labour force below secondary studies, or circa 3.5 million adults according to the 2001 Population Census).

These NOC register a record 1.6 million enrolments and have topped the impressive figure of 430,000 certifications (9th and 12th grades).⁵³

In **France** individuals can apply for validation by submitting a portfolio of experiences including detailed descriptions of skills and competences to the ministry responsible for awarding qualifications. An established jury appointed by the responsible ministry decides upon the award of a full or partial qualification based on the application.

In the **Netherlands** individuals can apply for validation of experiences by submitting a portfolio of experiences to a recognised provider of "experience certificates". Assessors within these providers can deliver an experience certificate to be used either for job search or for official recognition by an examination board of a formal education and training provider. The Dutch validation system is further supported by a knowledge centre which set up a quality code for validation that has to be respected by the providers of experience certificates. In 2009 the government provided funding for validation as a means to cope with collective redundancies, allowing dismissed employees to obtain an experience certificate facilitating their recruitment by other employers. A comprehensive evaluation study on the Dutch experiences, in which more than one thousand individuals, stakeholders and employers participated, made it clear that the Dutch system of validation has been successful as an instrument for enhancing the qualification level of individuals. The same study showed that the impact of the validation system for individual career development is more mixed, but that validation of non-formal and informal learning is an important catalyst in situations where individuals invest in the management of their own career and where employers invest in the careers of their staff⁵⁴.

Policy example 11: NQF and credit system for flexible pathways in Slovenia

In Slovenia the qualifications framework and the credit system are used to enable the design of pathways within a specific field/ professional area. In Slovenia pathways are developed by enabling people with lower level qualifications to have their credit recognised in view of higher level qualifications (mainly in VET). There are three levels of vocational upper-secondary qualifications in Slovenia each having a different level but also a different typical duration. The objective of these pathways is to enable young people or adults with lower level qualifications to have their credit transferred if they want to achieve higher level qualifications. The credit is transferred across pathways on the basis of providers' decisions. Some modules for general education are identical and can therefore be transferred easily. The transfer of credit for vocational components is decided not only on the basis of completion but also on basis of the level of performance as expressed in grades. It is also possible to award them partial qualifications (NVQs) if they did not succeed in achieving the full qualification. Equivalence between partial qualifications and units of qualifications is established when qualifications are designed. This will have a two-fold purpose: it will on one hand enable learners who fail the full qualification to hold at least a partial qualification and on the other it will facilitate accumulation for adult learners who achieve a partial qualification through

⁵³ R. Carneiro (ed.) (2011), *Accreditation of prior learning as a lever for lifelong learning: lessons learnt from the New Opportunities Initiative, Portugal*, UNESCO, MENON Network, CEPCEP, http://www.ucp.pt/site/resources/documents/CEPCEP/Accreditation_final.pdf.

⁵⁴ D. Stoel & E. Wentzel (2011), *Beloften, feiten en ongekende mogelijkheden: Onderzoek naar de effecten van EVC*

validation and wish to achieve a full vocational qualification.

Source: Cedefop (2010) Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks, http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5505_en.pdf

Policy examples 12:

In **Estonia**, the 2003 University Act requires that universities accredit prior and experiential learning and obliges them to elaborate their own rules and procedures for recognition. The legal act Standard of Higher Education (*Kõrgharidusstandard*, updated in 2007) sets a very broad framework for common regulations for recognition of prior learning and states that all HEIs need to have such regulations within the institution.

In **Finland**, a set of 21 recommendations for universities and polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) regarding the validation of informal and non-formal learning were prepared in 2009 by the Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. This set of recommendations covers various aspects of validation, from both the perspective of HEIs and students' perspectives and general recommendations for implementation.

Source: Cedefop (2010), European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010 Country Report Finland: <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77460.pdf> and Country Report Estonia: <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77456.pdf>

Policy examples 13:

Modularisation for more flexible learning in Lithuania

The 2007 revision of the 1997 Law on vocational education introduced a modularised structure of qualifications whereby content is regulated by individual guidelines for higher education study fields and professional standards. According to the Law, a module in vocational training is a self-contained teaching and learning unit, leading from a defined input level of the learner to a competence increase planned in advance. Modularisation has been taken forward to introduce more flexibility and greater opportunities for lifelong learning; it also links to the expected development of validation of non-formal and informal learning in vocational education and training. Modularisation is also conceived as part of creating better conditions for learning mobility and an overall internationalisation of studies.

The modularised approach has been tested in a European project for the trade of decorator/builder (funded by Leonardo da Vinci /Lifelong learning programme). As this trade is offered by 40 of the 70 VET institutions testing of modularisation involved more than 50% of all VET providers. This project took as a starting point the Scottish modular VET to develop a European modular training programme for decorator/builder with the associated credit system.

Mechanisms to recognise non-formal/informal learning

According to the existing procedure, individuals with at least one year of work experience and those over 18 can apply to VET institutions for the recognition of their competences. The level of skills and knowledge of an applicant is defined on the basis of VET standards and relevant VET programmes. Furthermore the applicant and the school agree on a timetable of courses as necessary and a final qualification exam. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded the qualification certificate or qualified worker's diploma which gives access to further formal education. For those who continue learning according to a chosen VET programme prior learning is recognised as part of their training programme.

Non-formal education may be taken into account at sectoral or employer level for improvement of professional position (when participating in validation (atestacija), annual activity assessment, etc.). For example, for receiving a license in health care sector nurses must prove participation in qualification development events in the five years prior to the assessment. The documents (certificates, diplomas, etc.) provided by nurses are assessed by experts in charge of validation and certification.

Source: Vilnius Builder Training Centre et al. (2010); Cedefop ReferNET Lithuania (2011).

Structuring initial VET in units and modules in Luxembourg

The 2008 Law for reforming VET focuses on reorienting IVET towards a modular and competence-oriented structure. The changes setting up requirements for ECVET and EQF/NQF implementation will run in the period 2009-13. The reform concerns 119 initial VET programmes over three qualification levels. All vocational training is structured into learning units which can be accumulated.

The reform includes dividing IVET programmes into components (units and modules). It is new to the Luxembourg VET system that units correspond to assessable partial qualifications and are further structured into modules. Units run from six to a maximum of twelve months; the model foresees six units corresponding to a full qualification. The development from qualification to curricula is based on a four step approach: the definition of professional profile (Berufsprofil) includes working areas/domains, assignments and tasks; the development of training profiles (Ausbildungsprofil) to which competences are associated (competences are defined following a 2008 law as encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to master one profession or trade; they are also broken down into cognitive competence, social competence, self-competence); the training profiles are structured into framework curricula (*Rahmenlehrpläne*) which includes units or modules; the framework curricula build the basis for developing assessment and curricula.

Source: Euler and Frank (2011); Ministère de l'Education nationale et de la formation professionnelle (2011).

Policy example 14: Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life, Norway

The Programme for Basic Competence in Working Life (BCWL) was introduced to fund and support basic learning projects in enterprises, or projects aiming at preparing people for working life in co-operation with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. The overall goal is the prevention of exclusion from working life because of insufficient basic competence. Key features of the programme include: co-operation between companies and providers; the provision of guidance and information; and quality assurance for providers. The programme requires close co-operation with employers who agree to the provision of basic skills in the workplace in return for financial compensation for workers' time spent on structured learning.

Implementation is evidence-based: the responsible Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning Vox carries out research, analyses and evaluations in the field of lifelong learning. Data are collected from public registers and Vox surveys relating to enterprises and to the general public, which contribute to the body of statistical evidence on adult learning and documents needs and effects of measures and methods – for the individual and for society. Consequently, Vox contributes to the development of provision for individually adapted training in literacy, numeracy, ICT skills and oral communication skills for adults, and is also engaged in the development of an integrated service for career guidance and validation.

In co-operation with education providers and enterprises Vox developed competence goal descriptions for adult basic skills and contributes to the development of screening tools, as well as the continuing professional development for teachers and facilitators delivering these skills. Since 2008 BCWL applicants are obliged to relate their proposals to the Norwegian Framework for Basic Skills for Adults. The framework comprises: competence goals in literacy, numeracy, digital competence and oral communication; guidelines for providers; mapping tools and tests; didactic models and teaching resources; and a model for teacher training. *Source: GHK (2010) case study, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 166*

Policy example 15: Turning a university into a lifelong learning centre - University of Graz/Austria

The University started to develop its lifelong learning strategy in 2000 and adopted it in 2002, following a long internal consultation process, including the following steps:

- 1) Internal survey on the state of continuing education within the university – including an assessment of strengths and weaknesses;
- 2) Research on models of lifelong learning in universities and an internal project for the development of services and products in continuing education;
- 3) Consultation of internal stakeholders (Rector's office, heads of departments, staff, etc.) and establishment of an internal project group.

The implementation of lifelong learning activities within the university requires pooling of expertise, time and commitment from a large number of staff, i.e. the key internal stakeholders. They are initiators and designers of learning activities but also participants (and learners) in some cases. Therefore creating a genuine lifelong learning culture among the staff members was crucial to the success of the development as well as implementation of the strategy. A central feature of the strategy is that LLL has become an intrinsic element of the University's activities and is among the core internal performance indicators. In other words LLL activities are not a secondary activity but are of equivalent importance to the core

teaching and research activities. As a key result of the strategy development a *Centre for Continuing Education* was established as an independent organisational unit which is in charge of developing and promoting education and training activities and programmes of general interest to the broad public. The creation of an innovative learning offer, based on the University's scientific knowledge and expertise, is combined with information and guidance to non-traditional target groups of learners. A further result of the strategy process is the "*Uni for Life*" programme, offering continuing professional development training for business and industry (for graduates/post-graduates).

Source: GHK (2010) case study, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 97

Policy examples 16: Adapted funding solutions to support flexible learning pathways

In **Denmark**, Higher education institutions are paid a one-off taximeter funding if the competence assessment to enter higher education results in an exemption of at least 15% of the study programme⁵⁵;

In **Belgium/Flanders**, the funding model for higher education, introduced in 2008, includes multi-annual agreements between the minister and each higher education institution setting out agreed objectives and targets and the commitment of the institution to deliver on them and the amount of funding involved. The performance agreements include objectives aimed at widening participation and incentives for the institutions to support achievement and success of students from more vulnerable backgrounds, from ethnic minorities, students with a disability, or students who are already in work.⁵⁶

In **Finland** a performance based funding system has been introduced to support the VET reform in view of competence-based and individualised provision. The main indicators for the performance based funding are employment after graduation, proportion of students completing their programmes and students continuing on to further studies. *An additional incentive is the vocational education award of excellence given by the Ministry of Education to the top three schools each year. The excellence award competition has been organised annually since 2001.*⁵⁷

Policy example 17: National Plan on Adult Education in Slovenia

In Slovenia, a National Plan on Adult Education was adopted in June 2004 and its implementation is determined by the Annual Programme of Adult Education passed by the government. The development of lifelong learning practices is closely associated with the adult education field, as well as with social, political, economic, cultural and technological changes. Key features are: holistic access and the connectedness of all forms of learning; diversity and flexibility of learning offers; key competences and learning for personal growth, work and the development of society; possibilities for the recognition and validation of

⁵⁵ GHK (2010) *European Inventory of Validation of non-formal and informal learning 2010: thematic report on costs and benefits of validation*, <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77455.pdf>

⁵⁶ National Report 2009 of the Flemish community Belgium on the implementation of "Education and training 2010", http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/natreport09/belgiumnl_en.pdf

⁵⁷ European Employment Observatory (2009): *Spring 2009 review*

learning; appropriate information and guidance infrastructure. The network of fourteen lifelong learning centres in Slovenia is central to the achievement of improved quality and effectiveness of education and training systems. Their activities include counselling services to local communities, outreach, a mobile unit to serve Roma communities and self-directed as well as organised learning at lifelong learning points.

Source: GHK (2010) case study, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 172

Policy examples 18: System level measures in Ireland to support equity of access to higher education

In 2008 the Irish Higher education authority defined a strategy to strengthen the access of people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher education. Building on the findings of an earlier evaluation⁵⁸, the strategy presents a range of actions to reach this global objective, including:

- Institution-wide access plans to promote greater equity of access and participation in higher education.
- Building capacity through a range of supports, including continuing professional development, practitioner workshops and seminars and through the Strategic Innovation Fund.
- Supporting exchange of good practice in widening participation for practitioners, registrars and all interested staff.
- Recognising good equality practice: The National Access Office promotes equality training for staff in higher education institutions and recognition of good equality practice as part of promotional criteria.
- Expansion of part-time/flexible learning opportunities and student support for part-time learners
- Diversification of entry routes to higher education: Key issues include: progression, national policy for higher education access courses, higher education access route, supplementary admission route for students with disability and recognition of prior learning
- An early second-chance strategy for 17-22 year olds
- Promotional campaign
- Transition year module on access to further and higher education

The mid-term review⁵⁹ showed progress in several areas namely participation of mature students and students with disabilities, flexible learning opportunities but also development of institutional access strategies.

⁵⁸ National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, HEA (2006) *Towards the best education for all: an evaluation of access programmes in higher education in Ireland* http://www.heai.ie/webfm_send/1577

⁵⁹ National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, HEA (2010) *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 : Mid-Term Review*

Extracts from: National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, HEA (2008) National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013, [http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/National_Access_Plan_2008-2013_\(English\).pdf](http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/National_Access_Plan_2008-2013_(English).pdf)

Policy example 19: Competence agencies ('Kompetenzagenturen') in Germany

Competence agencies in over 200 locations in Germany aim at the social and professional integration of disadvantaged young people and at improving their transition from school to work. The young people targeted (for example young people having left school without qualifications, long term unemployed, people facing family difficulties or those in debt) face multidimensional problems and are not often reached by the existing support system. The initiative focuses on encouraging them to reflect on their own skills and competences and on developing these. Competence agencies empower these young people to manage their own lives and support them in the development and implementation of a realistic career plan.

The support provided by the competence agencies' staff is tailored to the situation of each individual. Teams are made up of social workers and educators who provide an advisory role with the help of psychologists. Competence agencies follow a specific method, called "Case Management", to empower disadvantaged young people and foster their social and professional integration. In this process, the added value of competence agencies is both to provide services and to serve as a gate-opener to services provided by the partners. The process can be described as follows:

Situation assessment: The focus is on what brought the young person to the competence agency and on his/her biography. Questions such as "why did you decide to drop out from what you undertook in the last few years" are explored (two-three meetings with a case manager).

Test of competences: A psychologist or social worker undertakes standardised tests with the young person to evaluate their key competences, including communication skills and ability to concentrate.

Debriefing: The young person is given the opportunity to assess the support so far and possibilities for further support are discussed.

Detailed career plan: The young person and the case manager develop and agree on a detailed career plan specifying achievable objectives and the steps needed to achieve them. It also involves career/vocational guidance generally provided by the local employment agency¹³³, in partnership with chambers and professional organisations. Typical objectives are entry into the job market (job, apprenticeship, internship) or entry into a vocational school.

Follow-up: Approximately quarterly, an exchange session takes place to follow up on the implementation of the career plan. Discussions take place on which steps have been accomplished successfully, what difficulties were encountered and, if needed, objectives are revised.

Feedback: A few months after the person has started training or a job, another exchange session is organised to ensure s/he has not dropped out. If problems are detected, other exchanges take place. If this is not sufficient, the whole process of case management can be restarted.

Source: GHK (2010), full case study, http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2010/strategies_en.pdf, p. 136

Policy example 20: Effective practice in raising aspirations of young people – UK England

A review of examples of effective practice which focused on engaging and re-engaging, and on the progression of young people (apprentices or NEETs) with regard to education and training showed that the following aspects of the learning approaches were related to success:

Engage with young people at an earlier stage and at key transition points: To raise awareness at an opinion forming stage such as through taster sessions, mentors, visits. Key transition points include from primary to secondary; between compulsory and post-compulsory; and between education and labour market.

Provide for the specific needs of the different sub-groups within the NEET category: The NEET term is problematic as it refers to different groups of young people with a range of different and often multiple needs of varying intensity. Key areas of effective practice include distinguishing between ‘frictional’ and long term NEET; BME and gender specific initiatives; targeting specific support to address the specific barriers of particular groups, especially childcare.

An alternative offer to mainstream schooling: A key element to raising the aspirations of young people, particularly those currently disengaged from learning, is for the offer to be something that is not associated with their experience of formal schooling, yet importantly still linked to the mainstream so that re-engagement is possible and encouraged, such as offering young people opportunities to study outside of school, with different learning styles and experience a new environment and also to engage in positive activities.

Use of mentors, role models and peer support to encourage engagement: A recognised effective approach in the context of funded pathways to employment and training such as personal tutors, business mentors, peer support, and role models. Group work as well as one to one mentoring can provide a mechanism for providing contact with and support from peers and non-peers alike. Developing group work in this way can be resource intensive, requiring time and particular skills in facilitating group dynamics.

Impartial, realistic, tailored and responsive information, advice and guidance: IAG should be: At the right level, delivered in the right learning style and in the right environment, specific, impartial, realistic and provided on a one-to-one basis and provided by experienced and knowledgeable advisers, focused on ensuring all young people are provided with IAG at the ages of 11, 14 and 16 years, multi-dimensional and embracing.

Flexible and tailored support based on trust and respect: Some programmes include a designated trusted adult with whom they build a strong relationship founded on advocacy, brokerage and support. Learning should be a co-operative venture between adults and young people. Practitioners should understand the individual and be supported in a flexible and tailored way. Staff support and development is important.

Pro-active tracking and empowering young people: Need to proactively track progress to stimulate and reaffirm engagement in a way that captures both personal development and attainment. This is often the element of support that is neglected by providers due to competing priorities; this area of work needs to be recognised and properly resourced. Equally important is allowing young people to lead on the review process through a package of individualised support.

Celebration of achievement: Particularly important for those that have not received a certificate or qualification previously e.g. end of course awards, celebration events, such as Youth Achievement Awards.

On-going support and tracking: Progression is not always about ‘getting a job’ but should also include further skills development and an appreciation of the value of learning. Relationships and activities which have lifted aspirations can be difficult to maintain beyond the life of a programme unless support continues after the programme. In this context, identifying destinations and monitoring regression is therefore important, particularly for disadvantaged learners

Extract from: Learning and Skills Council (2009) Identifying Effective Practice in Raising Young People’s Aspirations, http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/national/nat-raising_aspirations-re-24sep2009-v1-1.pdf