

Message to delegates



“I’m very pleased indeed to be able to make a contribution to what is the important issue of the new century.

We’ve been developing, both in Britain and in the European Union, the idea of lifelong learning as a key element in equipping people for that new century, both as individual citizens, in terms of their quality of life and their creativity, but also in terms of being able to hold down a job. And you’ll know as well as I know that the important element for the education and employment systems of the future will be the success of each of us in acquiring those basic skills and being able to apply them and recognising just what happens if we don’t.

For all of us the task is to get that message across: that learning is for life; that we can renew our skills; that that gives us greater security in employment; but it also equips our nations to be able to take on the scourge of unemployment; to be able to equip ourselves for competitiveness; and to ensure that Europe is in a position to take advantage of the new technologies of that new century.

Good luck with the rest of the conference.”

Secretary of State for Education and Employment, The Rt Hon David Blunkett

What you said...

At the very first conference session yesterday, we invited you to identify the themes and issues you hope to see discussed at this conference.

- *The problem of continuing social exclusion and the roles of education and training in overcoming the problem were stressed. Social exclusion was clearly linked in many minds with funding and with qualifications.*
- *The former was not so much a crude cry for more money, but for ways to be found in which resources could be made to reach those who need them most - and to reach them in ways which will empower them (the UK’s individual learning account proposal, raised by Baroness Blackstone, might be one way of approaching this). Can funding not be seen more as a lever for change - and is this not what*

European programme funding is really for?

- *Qualifications, like funding, need to reach the previously excluded, and to be readily portable across institutions, within countries and across borders.*
- *There was a clear feeling from the responses that you would like to approach the generalised issue of social exclusion with the practical tools which funding and qualifications provide.*
- *Despite the best efforts of local and regional governments and institutions, and of the Commission, there was a feeling that good and successful practice - often funded by special schemes - is still not being widely and effectively promoted and publicised. We still do not learn enough from each other.*
- *A number of you, looking at national issues, are persuaded that the distribution of resources for education and training is simply unfair. Not surprisingly (and other delegates will have other views), higher education*

was thought to be getting more than its fair share.

- *Some perceived a conflict between the notion of lifelong learning as embracing all kinds of learning at all stages of people’s lives (and a special plea was made to consider the learning needs of older people) and that learning which is related only to work and short-term economic needs.*

Overall, it is clear that for most of you, lifelong learning must be seen as inclusive. It is not only about people learning over a longer period of their lives, but also about new and different people learning. Many of you also pointed out that we have some of the tools to hand to effect the necessary changes.

“The Learning Age, the Government’s Green Paper on Lifelong Learning sets out a vision and an agenda for the future. This conference is the start of turning that vision into something that works for all our citizens.”

Nick Stuart, Director General, Employment, Lifelong Learning and International Directorate, DjEE

The story so far . . .



left to right: Thomas O'Dwyer, Baroness Blackstone, Sue Waddington, Juliet Morris, Paolo Federighi and Paul Belanger.

Top of agenda

Baroness Blackstone opened the conference yesterday by reaffirming that the UK Government has put lifelong learning firmly at the top of its agenda during its Presidency of the European Union.

"Continuing education and updating skills has been a key issue for the UK Presidency," said Baroness Blackstone. "Programmes such as SOCRATES, LEONARDO DA VINCI and ADAPT enable us to share good practice and innovation with our European partners."

The Minister welcomed the 250 delegates from 25 countries - "25 different cultures, 25 different economies, 25 different education and training systems" - and noted that despite their differences, European Union Member States share the problems of "...high unemployment amongst those with low skills; a core of long-term unemployed people, especially among the young; and resulting social exclusion."

She invited delegates to consider three key questions: "First, how to ensure initiatives in this country and across Europe really benefit those we want to get into learning? Too often, those already privileged in education or other ways are the beneficiaries.

"People who do not take part in learning, who lack skills are too easily estranged from society. Shut out, they cannot experience the benefits. Nor can they make a full contribution to their communities. The economy suffers from the waste of their potential - their creativity, ideas, and their enterprise. If they cannot contribute, we are all the poorer. That is the challenge we all face in our different circumstances.

"Second, how can we give real ownership of local programmes to those they are intended to help? Ownership among local people is essential if we are to overcome the barriers to learning that so many people face."

"My third and final question is: how to get employers really engaged - especially those from small/medium-sized firms, who have no past record of training?"

The Trade Unions have a role to play here, and the Government has acknowledged this by setting up a fund to encourage them to even greater efforts in involving their members in learning in new and exciting ways.

Policy making is a dialogue between governments and civil society. This issue of the newsletter has been fairly official - please help us make tomorrow's different.

So if you have a comment or an idea, do let us have it. Just hand it in to the conference reception desk by 16.00 hours today.

The silent revolution

Paul Belanger spoke of the "silent revolution in adult learning now in the making". In advanced industrialised countries, a third - or even, as in Sweden, half - of the adult population are involved every year in some form of adult learning. However, the participation in adult learning remains closely related to the social conditions determined by educational achievement and income. It is also often restricted by work-related demand.

He went on to outline changes in society, people's involvement with many aspects of it and the role of lifelong learning in helping them engage more fully.

The challenge in mobilising civil society was to ask how governments and others can work to mobilise learning to democratise democratic societies - to make them something that works for all, in communities, in regions, in states and internationally.

As he said, "This debate is only just beginning."

Paul Belanger has been Director of the UNESCO Institute for Education since 1989. Previously, he was General Director of the Canadian Institute for Adult Education in Canada. He is the author of many studies on adult education in Canada, Africa and at an international level.

"Europe is changing. Education and training are the levers we use to ensure that change happens in ways that benefit all our citizens."

Tony Uden.

Europe: catalyst for change

Dr O'Dwyer spoke about the different aspects of lifelong learning. He talked about the updating of skills to maintain employability and competitiveness, and ensuring that people who drop out of the learning process can find a way back into it. He also referred to the importance of ensuring that work is organised so that it becomes a learning environment for the worker and for the organisation, and that knowledge and know-how gained at work can be acknowledged and accredited.

Dr O'Dwyer also highlighted the spread and ever-greater diversity of the European Union. Within the next year there will be at least 27 countries participating in these programmes

"Over the last few months," said Dr O'Dwyer, "we have been engaged in an extensive consultation process on the future of the education, training and youth programmes with the Community institutions and their various partners.

He emphasised that mobility will continue to be one of the key types of action under the new programmes.

Dr O'Dwyer explained that the experience of implementing the five objectives of the Cresson White Paper *Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society* confirmed the value of being able to identify key issues on a multi-country basis, and for approaching them through innovative pilot projects.

"European programmes will never supplant national systems," he said "but they can act as lubricants promoting mobility and catalysts accelerating change in the right direction."

Dr Thomas O'Dwyer is Director General for Education, Training and Youth at the European Commission. He is also President of the Board of CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) and first President of the European Foundation for Vocational Training.

Challenges

Professor Coolahan drew attention initially to the changes and reasons why an agenda for lifelong learning has emerged.

Lifelong learning, he suggested, is the only way to respond to what he characterises as an era of uncertainty which includes changes to family structures, work, technologies, demography and encompasses challenges in terms of multi-culturalism, social exclusion and environmental sustainability.

The question posited has changed from what *can* lifelong learning do? - to what *must* lifelong learning do? The essential has become an imperative.

In the context of the many challenges facing individuals and society on the threshold of the new century, lifelong learning provides the conceptual basis for us to cope with a multiplicity of changes, rather than being the victims of them.

Promoting social inclusion

Sue Waddington MEP spoke of the widening gap between "those who know and those who do not know", and emphasised the need for support at national and European level for the involvement in learning of all areas of society.

"All the evidence suggests," she said, "that those who participate in lifelong learning are those who were successful in their initial education, while those who left school without qualifications have far fewer chances to gain access in adulthood.

"The unqualified are more likely to be the long-term unemployed, or in poorly-paid insecure employment, and less likely to vote or participate in civil society. Their talents go to waste."

Those who do not participate in lifelong learning often have little incentive to do so, faced with basic problems such as lack of opportunity. It is important to begin the process early - to improve the mainstream education and training systems to deal with under-achievement at an early stage, and continue the process with opportunities at all stages of life.

"If the learning society is to be a reality," said Sue Waddington, "the ownership of education and training should no longer be monopolised by schools, colleges, universities and training bodies. Learning takes place in a variety of settings - including the home, the community and the workplace.

"Partnerships between education and training providers, community and voluntary organisations, local and regional authorities, Trade Unions and employers, including small enterprises have the potential to build learning pathways and provide the incentives and chances for everyone."

For these partnerships to succeed, she said, national governments and the European Union have a crucial role to play.

Sue Waddington has been a Labour Member of the European Parliament since 1994. She was Parliament's spokesperson on the Year of Lifelong Learning, and has produced reports for Parliament on the Leonardo Training Programme and Towards a Learning Society.

"By ensuring the competitiveness of our businesses and the skills of our workforce, lifelong learning provides the essential glue between competitiveness and social cohesion."

Chris Humphries. Director, TEC National Council and Chairman of the National Skills Task Force.

EMTA

Ability to learn is the key to economic success at the national level, employability and security at the individual level. That is why it is vital to create a culture of lifelong learning throughout the UK.

Clearly the foundation for lifelong learning must be laid in school. But much more needs to be done post-school to foster learning. We need to improve the information, advice and guidance to adults and make learning more accessible; providers of education and training must become more responsive to the needs of individuals and employers; we have to persuade employers to invest more in updating and adapting the skills of their workforce; and funding arrangements need to be created which reflect the relative benefits to, and contributions of, government, employers and individuals.

Initiatives such as Individual Learning Accounts are a welcome step in bringing about the culture we need. The University for Industry, too, is an exciting, ambitious project. But these will only succeed if the political will is matched by the efforts of employers, educational institutions, TECs, NTOs and those involved in the provision of and support for learning and learners themselves.

We all have a role to play in creating a learning culture in which everyone will seek and be granted a lifetime entitlement to learning. It makes sense from a social point of view, but, more importantly, it makes economic sense. Failure to learn means that the United Kingdom will be held back in its quest for global competitiveness into the 21st century.

Dr Michael Sanderson, Chief Executive, Engineering and Marine Training Authority.

"Learning for life - to create a life."

Professor Tom Cannon. Chief Executive, Management Charter Initiative.

Fun in the sun!

TV presenter Juliet Morris (above) opening the Festival of Lifelong Learning, organised by Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The festival forms part of Adult Learners' Week, and is running from 17 to 19 May, alongside the conference.

Over the three days, there will be a range of workshops, competitions and performances. All activities are free, and include computing and surfing the Internet, languages, cookery, music, drama, dance and much more. There will

be the opportunity to talk to colleges, universities, professional bodies, employers and careers advisers to find out about the vast range of learning opportunities on offer. Events all take place in Manchester Town Hall and Albert Square, just across the road from the conference.

Adult Learners' Week is organised by NIACE (the Institute for Adult Continuing Education), and runs from 16 to 22 May. The week is a chance for many people to get a taste of learning or find out more about what's on offer.

Thank you!

This conference has been organised by the Department for Education and Employment, with assistance and support from the European Commission.

We would like to thank those organisations who have contributed to the success of the conference and supporting events - NIACE (the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education); Manchester City Council; Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC); Oracle Training Limited and ICL. Thanks also go to EMTA, the Engineering and Marine Training Authority, for their valuable support.

Stop press

Community Action for Lifelong Learning (CALL) are calling for an informal group of delegates to meet and discuss practical ways of "giving real ownership of local programmes to those we are trying to help".

CALL is an embryonic group with little funding, but urgently needs national and international contacts.

Contact delegate Liz Millman via conference reception.