



## **EAEA's answer to the European Commission's Survey on Skills and Qualifications April 2014**

The European Association for the Education of Adults welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to promote a "[European Area for Skills and Qualifications](#)". EAEA agrees that a lot of work remains to be done to, for example, create more coherence between instruments. Nevertheless, both the questions of the survey as well as the background document give the appearance of a number of technical challenges. EAEA believes that a more strategic and comprehensive "European Area of Learning" is necessary to face the challenges of Europe.

EAEA believes that all kinds of learning for adults need to be supported and promoted – formal, non-formal as well as informal learning. We also believe that successful policies and initiatives can only be implemented successfully by bringing a wide range of stakeholders on board. The consultation mentions businesses, but social partners are key players as are civil society organisations.

### **European member states need to provide and fund learning opportunities**

In Europe, according to [OECD's PIAAC study](#), 20% of the adult population has low basic skills – including literacy, numeracy and digital skills. It is urgent that Europe faces this issue by providing and funding learning opportunities for adults to master basic skills. In terms of digital skills, if skills to use computers need to be taught, also computers and Internet access need to be largely provided. Learning opportunities must be learner-centered (centered on their needs) and easily accessible for all – concerning the location, the schedule and the frequency of the course. Non-formal adult education has proven its efficiency when it comes to teaching basic skills to adults, especially to the ones that were not keen on following courses in a formal education system.

### **Key competences are crucial**

Transversal skills and especially key competences are another concern. In order to manage jobs and lives, key competences are crucial and should be part of any European strategy on education and training. EAEA would like to illustrate this with an example: with the increasing availability of OERs (Open Educational Resources), "learning to learn" is a necessary key competence that needs to be fostered. These key competences will be very valuable for the learner in his/her job and also in his/her personal life as a citizen and as an individual. EAEA therefore continues to value the key competences framework. EAEA agrees that reference frameworks can be helpful in understanding learning progress and outcomes but underlines that they need to be learner-centred.

### **Guidance on learning opportunities for all**

Guidance and counselling are crucial elements of a global lifelong learning strategy. They should be provided to everyone and a focus on guidance and counselling on learning opportunities, whether it



has a professional or personal purpose, should be offered to everyone, including the elderly. We agree that a streamlining of different initiatives can help simplify access.

### **Evaluating the learning process**

While EAEA agrees that the [European Qualifications Framework \(EQF\)](#) could be useful for recognizing learning outcomes from third countries, we would like to draw the attention to the fact that the development of EQFs in many European countries is concentrating very much on the formal system. Competences and skills that have been acquired in non-formal learning might therefore be undervalued.

### **Learning outcomes**

EAEA supports the shift to learning outcomes in order to understand acquired skills and competences better. Nevertheless, we do see the danger that this development might lead to the neglect and undervaluation of learning processes. Indeed, in non-formal adult education, the learning process, as well as the learning environment, plays a big role in the learner's experience. The BeLL study (<http://bell-project.eu/>) shows that many benefits for learners actually derive from the learning process (such as more social contacts and a wider social network).

### **Recognition and validation**

Concerning the question on whether recognition and validation frameworks should be developed for adult education, EAEA wishes to underline that this is not a simple 'yes' or 'no' question. We believe that validation and recognition systems in Europe need to be flexible so as not to formalize non-formal and informal learning. These forms of learning have proven to be efficient and have also been very successful, for example, at reaching people that have had bad experiences with the formal system.

We believe that learners should have the right to have their non- and informal learning recognized but any criteria or procedure would have to be developed with a strong input from the non-formal sector in order to avoid creating new inequalities between different forms of learning (e.g. the 'validated' and the non-validated' for example).

EAEA would like to warn of a development that, in the future, might differentiate between learning provision that is 'within the framework' and one that is 'outside the framework'. EAEA pleads for the recognition, support and promotion of all kinds of learning never mind its relation to respective frameworks.

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