



European Youth Forum  
Response to

The Commission Communication  
*'Making a European Area of  
Lifelong Learning a Reality'*

Adopted by the Bureau 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2002

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Why the European Youth Forum Wishes to Respond to the Communication on Lifelong Learning**

The European Youth Forum welcomed the publication of the Commission's Communication on Lifelong Learning on 21 November 2001 as a positive step forward from the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning of June 2001. We had been invited by the European Commission to take part in a consultation on the Memorandum on lifelong learning from April to September 2001. We willingly agreed to participate as an associated member since it was vital that the views of young people be presented in the consultation process on an issue of such importance to youth. Eleven of our member organisations actively contributed to this process. The results were compiled in a synthesis report.<sup>1</sup> Member organisations were happy to attend the NGO conference on lifelong learning in September 2001 and to participate in the workshops.

The European Youth Forum represents 91 national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations and is therefore an excellent channel of communication and consultation with the youth of Europe on lifelong learning matters. We wish to actively contribute to further developments in the area of education and lifelong learning and hope to be consulted on future developments in this area. We would like to build on the work done during the consultation process to promote lifelong learning among our member organisations and provide feedback to the institutions on policy developments in this area.

While the European Youth Forum welcomes the Communication on lifelong learning, we regret that more recommendations were not made to promote non-formal education for young people. However, the Youth Forum welcomes the initiative of the Spanish Presidency to build on the work of the Communication and look at the value of non-formal learning acquired in youth settings. Both this document and the workshop on 'youth and non-formal learning' at the Youth Gathering in Murcia were important steps forward in this respect. We urge the Council to take the youth dimension into consideration in its resolution on lifelong learning on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2002.

### **Is Lifelong Learning Relevant for Young People?**

The European Youth Forum uses the term 'lifewide' rather than 'lifelong' learning since we believe that this is more relevant to the situation of young people. By 'lifewide' we mean learning that encompasses all formal, non-formal and informal learning environments. This highlights the non-formal context that is most relevant for youth organisations since they are one of the main providers of non-formal education. Through their activities in youth organisations, young people acquire important skills

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<sup>1</sup> 'Reactions to the 'Memorandum on Lifelong Learning' by Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum, compiled by Christian Meseth  
<http://www.youthforum.org/spb/beliefs/education/058601e.pdf>

such as communication and interpersonal skills, leadership skills, planning, teamwork, conflict resolution, intercultural awareness, management, problem solving skills, language learning skills and debating. In addition, they develop qualities such as commitment, responsibility, democratic awareness, motivation, participation, initiative, respect, tolerance and self-confidence.<sup>2</sup> The European Youth Forum works to promote youth organisations as providers of non-formal education. Therefore, any policy promoting lifelong learning is very relevant to our work.

The European Youth Forum particularly welcomes the fact that the Communication considers active citizenship and social inclusion as objectives of lifelong learning since they are of particular relevance in youth organisations. This is a considerable step forward from the Memorandum that tended to emphasise employment related objectives. In order to practice active citizenship, young people need to be able to learn to find relevant information about the world around them, critically assess it, make judgements and act on it. Increasing young people's self-confidence and autonomy helps prevent social exclusion. We believe that activities in youth organisations provide an excellent means of teaching these skills.

However, while we understand that the Communication was not intended specifically for young people, the Youth Forum regrets that more emphasis is not placed on non-formal learning which is of particular relevance to young people outside the formal education system. While we welcome the provisions made as a step forward in promoting lifelong learning in Europe, we regret that more provisions have not been made to encourage the non-formal learning that occurs in youth organisations. This is all the more regrettable given the weakness of the provisions on lifelong learning in the White Paper on Youth.

We felt that the Communication conveys a lack of understanding of the importance of youth organisations as providers of non-formal education for young people.<sup>3</sup> It is important to highlight the distinction between formal and non-formal learning so that young people understand that lifelong learning is relevant for them and are aware of the different environments where learning takes place.

This response will be divided into three sections. The first section will focus on the Youth Forum's opinion of the general conception of lifelong learning presented in the Communication. In the second section, we will present our priorities in lifelong learning and consider how they have been addressed in the Communication. The third part will focus on the lifelong learning framework as suggested by the Communication and the possibilities it offers for future co-operation. (Our recommendations for building on the proposals of the Communication have been put in bullet points under the relevant sections.)

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<sup>2</sup> 'The Recognition of Non-Formal Education - A Priority for the Youth Movement in Europe', Youth Forum, 1996

<sup>3</sup> The role of youth organisations is only mentioned once in the Communication on p. 21

## I: CONCEPTION OF LIFELONG LEARNING - 'LIFELONG' OR 'LIFEWIDE'?

The Youth Forum welcomes the definition of lifelong learning given in the Communication as a considerable improvement on the definition given in the Memorandum. It particularly welcomes the addition of active citizenship and social inclusion since these are particularly relevant to young people who are members of youth organisations. Given the wide variation in the definition of lifelong learning in different countries in Europe, the Youth Forum welcomes this clear definition, which is very useful for organisations working at the European level.

However, we regret that a clear definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning was not given to clarify these concepts since they are not understood by the majority of young people. They should be inserted in the section on definition<sup>4</sup> rather than the annex. In addition, they should be defined one after the other to allow for easy comparison and thus better comprehension. Examples of learning environments should be given for each of the three to make their meaning more concrete.

The Youth Forum agrees with the principles of centrality of the learner, equality of opportunity and the importance of high quality and relevance in lifelong learning as they apply to young people.

## II: FOUR PRIORITIES TO PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

While the European Youth Forum agrees that 'Member States must fundamentally transform learning systems' we believe that it is the responsibility of all actors to promote lifelong learning. We welcome the strategies suggested to promote lifelong learning, particularly the idea of partnerships, ensuring adequate resources, the idea of facilitating access to learning opportunities and creating a learning culture. We believe that non-formal learning in youth organisations is the joint responsibility of:

- 1) The individual - to **access** the learning opportunities that exist in youth organisations
- 2) Youth organisations - to **create a learning culture** within their organisation and to use every opportunity to promote learning
- 3) National governments and local authorities - to ensure **adequate resources**
- 4) Businesses and formal education institutions - to **recognise** learning achieved in youth organisations and build **partnerships** with them

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<sup>4</sup> Communication on Lifelong Learning, p.9

## 1) Facilitating Access by Bringing Together Learners and Learning Opportunities

The European Youth Forum strongly welcomes the acknowledgement of the work done by youth organisations. *'Non-formal education projects in the youth field, for example, increase the chances of young people participating in society and acquiring tolerant and democratic values'*.<sup>5</sup> Because our member organisations reach out to tens of millions of young people, we believe that youth organisations have an important role to play in bringing together learners and learning opportunities. We encourage youth organisations to increase their membership so that as many young people as possible have the opportunity to benefit from the services they provide. While we acknowledge that accessing learning opportunities is ultimately the responsibility of the young people themselves, we believe that certain measures can be taken to facilitate this.

The European Youth Forum welcomes the idea of *'targeting specific groups'*. We would like to see current education institutions adopt a more 'learner-centred' approach to make learning more relevant for young people from all social and cultural backgrounds.<sup>6</sup>

The European Youth Forum welcomes the recommendation to *'remove all social, geographical, psychological and other barriers'*<sup>7</sup> but believes that ICT is not the only answer. Many young people in rural areas do not have access to lifelong learning due to geographical obstacles. However, one should not forget that there is a high level of poverty in certain rural areas and ICT is a luxury that many young people cannot afford. With regard to breaking down psychological barriers, interpersonal relations are usually more effective than ICT in overcoming these.

- **The Youth Forum urges that more information on existing services and programmes be made available to young people in the Member States.**

The Youth Forum welcomes the call for *'tailored measures especially for basic skills'*<sup>8</sup> since basic skills are a prerequisite for access to learning opportunities after formal education. However, it believes that 'reading' and 'writing' should be included in this list of skills.<sup>9</sup>

- **The European Youth Forum urges that young people be represented on the European Guidance Forum which the Commission plans to set up in 2002 so that the needs of young people can be taken into consideration in the work done by the European Guidance Forum.**

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* P.13

<sup>8</sup> Communication on Lifelong Learning, p.13

<sup>9</sup> The list of basic skills includes 'IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship, social skills'. p.22

## 2) Creating a Learning Culture in Youth Organisations by Valuing Learning

During the European Year of Lifelong Learning the Youth Forum undertook a survey on lifelong learning amongst youth NGOs. A study was carried out by researchers from the Vrije Universiteit Brussels in co-operation with the Youth Forum. It aimed to find out to what extent youth organisations were familiar with the concept of lifelong learning propagated by the European Commission during the year and how aware youth organisations are of their proper potential and impact as educators of young people. The study revealed that *'while [those active as leaders or professionals in youth NGOs] believe they fulfil an educational role towards young people, they sense a lack of recognition of their work and value as educational agents by society in general and decision-makers in particular'*. Another finding was that while youth organisations feel they have an educating role through their activities towards their constituencies, few were conscious of the training role they play in regard to those who work voluntarily in secretariats or on the board of youth NGOs.

For these reasons, the Youth Forum believes that more research of this kind is necessary to highlight the deficiencies in order to channel resources for change in the most effective way possible. It also welcomes the statement that *'higher education and research institutions, for example, should introduce or increase research and training in the field of lifelong learning.'* It supports the Commission's recommendation to give support to *'how we learn in the contexts of formal, non-formal and informal learning' under the 6<sup>th</sup> Research Framework programme, through the Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and Youth programmes.*<sup>10</sup>

- **The European Youth Forum calls for studies aimed at identifying the personal, social and professional skills and competencies acquired by young people in youth activities, both at national level and through their participation in the Youth Programme.**

The Youth Forum tries to make youth organisations aware of their role as educators. We encourage our member organisations to publicise the outcomes of non-formal and informal education that result from their activities. We have developed a policy on citizenship education where we highlight the important role of youth organisations in teaching active citizenship. We encourage our member organisations to become 'learning organisations' and we organise training seminars on different aspects of youth work. We also make member organisations aware of other training courses offered by the Council of Europe and other institutions.

- **The European Youth Forum would like to see a greater provision of quality training for youth workers**

The Youth Forum believes that it is the responsibility of youth organisations to create a learning culture in their organisation. Therefore, it welcomes the recommendation aimed at *'encouraging public service providers, voluntary and community groups,*

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<sup>10</sup> Communication on Lifelong Learning, p.24

*employers and trade unions to develop and/or promote learning opportunities tailored to their particular constituencies'* <sup>11</sup> The Youth Forum welcomes the proposal for 'developing methodologies and standards for valuing non-formal and informal learning'.<sup>12</sup>

Concerning the concrete proposals for valuing non-formal and informal learning, the Youth Forum is quite sceptical. It is the European Forum on the Transparency of Qualifications who will co-ordinate the process of systematic exchange of experience and good practice in the field of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. However, this Forum concentrates entirely on vocational-based learning in the work place. Therefore, other contexts for non-formal learning are not taken into account by this body. This Forum gives little prospect for work on the recognition of non-formal learning in youth organisations.

- **The European Youth Forum requests that the Forum take a broader view of non-formal learning so that greater analysis can be made of the work done by youth organisations. It urges the Forum to work on the identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning achieved in youth activities, actions and programmes and within youth associations and voluntary organisations.**

The European Youth Forum welcomes the development of the 'European CV' as a means of promoting mobility and transparency. It believes that the section on 'social' and 'organisational' skills and competencies is a particularly good idea.

- **In order to support this CV, the European Youth Forum calls for the creation of a European Directory/Database of youth organisations for employers so that they can have quick access to more information on youth organisations mentioned by young people.**

The European Youth Forum welcomes the European Commission's proposal to establish by the end of 2003 'an inventory of methodologies, systems and standards for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.'

- **The Youth Forum asks the European Commission to include the methodologies used by youth organisations in this inventory.**

#### 1) Adequate Resources by Investing Time and Money in Learning

National youth organisations depend primarily on national governments for funding for their activities while international youth organisations depend mainly on the funding programmes of the EU and the Council of Europe. The Youth Forum believes that it is the responsibility of national governments and local authorities to increase funding for national youth organisations. The Youth Forum agrees with the Commission's statement that *'more resources are called for in respect of non-formal*

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<sup>11</sup> Communication on Lifelong Learning, p.14

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.16

*learning*'.<sup>13</sup> While the Commission mentions possible sources of funding, it is not clear how they could be used by youth organisations.<sup>14</sup>

- **The Youth Forum asks that administrative grants for International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations be increased to 3 million Euro so that the benefits of non-formal learning in youth organisations can be made available to a larger number of young people.**

#### 1) Partnerships Between Formal and Non-formal Educators to Create Innovative Pedagogues of Interest to Young People

The European Youth Forum believes that it is the responsibility of businesses and formal education institutions to create partnerships with youth organisations. It is important to note that many of our member organisations oppose any formal standardised assessment of their work. They believe that due to the diversity of youth, the different learning experiences that occur require different approaches to assessment.<sup>15</sup> However, they strongly believe that partnerships between formal and non-formal learning agents provide the best means of increasing the value of non-formal learning and put it on an equal footing with and give the same value as formal education. They believe that formal education and non-formal education are complementary and mutually beneficial. Therefore, we welcome the Commission's encouragement of local partnerships. Youth organisations would be very willing to participate in *'the sharing of ideas, experiences and good practice and actions to establish the European area of lifelong learning'*.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, it believes that the invitation to the Member States to *'encourage universities, education/training institutions and other relevant organisations to systematically implement measures aimed at the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning'* is a welcome step forward.<sup>17</sup>

- **The European Youth Forum calls for the development of methods and rules for evaluating non-formal learning in the youth field, with youth associations, voluntary organisations and youth workers being involved in the process.**

The Youth Forum also supports the idea of giving a European label to organisations which promote non-formal education but stresses that this should be used on a voluntary basis.

- **The European Youth Forum calls on the Commission to make assessments of the skills and competencies acquired by young people through their participation in the YOUTH programme by creating instruments for assessment at European level.**

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.19

<sup>14</sup> Communication on Lifelong Learning, p.12

<sup>15</sup> Strategy and Key Objectives for a Youth Policy in the European Union, p.4

<sup>16</sup> Communication on Lifelong Learning, p.11

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p.17

### **III: A LIFELONG LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?**

#### **A Lifelong Learning Framework at National Level?**

The European Commission's White Paper on Governance proposed that the Open Method of Coordination should be used on a case-by-case basis to '*achieve defined Treaty objectives*' and *encourage co-operation, the exchange of best practice and agreement on common targets and guidelines for the Member States*'.<sup>18</sup> The open-method of co-ordination is already being used to promote close co-operation between the EU and Member States in the field of education and training. However, given the problems which youth organisations have in using existing formal assessment methods for recognition of non-formal learning in youth organisations, it is difficult to see how this is 'quantifiable' and how the open method of co-ordination could be appropriate to implement this at Member State level. No specific information is given as to how the open method of co-ordination would be used to promote lifelong learning.

- **The European Youth Forum recommends that indicators be developed to measure young people's participation in youth organisations and in voluntary work programmes.**

The Youth Forum welcomes the call to the Member States to '*involve all relevant players, including providers of non-formal learning....in developing methodologies and standards for valuing non-formal and informal learning*'. It also welcomes the invitation to Member States to '*provide the legal framework to implement more widely the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning*'.

#### **A Lifelong Learning Framework at the European Level**

While the White Paper on Youth makes reference to lifelong learning for young people, its recommendations are weak. However, the Youth Forum welcomes the 'Contribution from the Youth Ministers Towards Defining Global and Coherent Strategies on Lifelong Learning'<sup>20</sup> under the Spanish Presidency as an important step in 'filling the policy gap' left by the White Paper on Youth and the Communication on Lifelong Learning.

- **Given the quality of the concrete proposals made in lifelong learning workshop at the Youth Gathering in Murcia, the European Youth Forum would like to recommend the involvement of young people in decisions taken on lifelong learning policy for youth.**

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<sup>18</sup> White Paper on Governance, p.9

<sup>19</sup> 'European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth', November 2001, p.19

<sup>20</sup> Contribution from the Youth Ministers Towards Defining Global and Coherent Strategies on Lifelong Learning, 1 February, 2002

## CONCLUSION

The European Youth Forum welcomes the Communication on lifelong learning as a significant step forward from the Memorandum because of the broader view it takes of lifelong learning which includes active citizenship and social inclusion. However, the Youth Forum regrets the absence of a 'youth dimension' in the Communication and the fact that it emphasises 'lifelong' rather than 'life-wide' learning which is more relevant to young people. We believe that it is important to emphasise non-formal learning environments to make lifelong learning more meaningful for young people and to teach them to learn outside the formal education system. We regret the lack of recognition of the work of youth organisations as important providers of non-formal education for young people and the absence of concrete recommendations to further their work in this area.

The European Youth Forum believes that the further development of non-formal education in youth organisations is the responsibility of

- 1) Youth organisations to ensure greater access
- 2) Young people to create a learning culture within their organisations
- 3) Local authorities, national governments and European institutions to ensure adequate resources

We believe that partnerships between formal and non-formal educators are the key to greater recognition and status of the learning achieved in youth organisations. More research needs to be done to identify ways in which this can be achieved at local, national and European level. We believe that it is important to involve young people in future consultation on lifelong learning to ensure that any provisions address their needs. The Youth Forum as a platform for young people in Europe would willingly engage in such consultations and participate in further research.