



## ***Education and training at the political forefront in the EU: the imperative for a Vice President for Lifelong Learning***

**Following the EU Elections, the new College of European Commissioners will have to address the artificial divide between education sectors in the European Commission.**

The 6-9 June 2024 elections to the European Parliament, the EU's only directly elected legislative body, are a key democratic event empowering citizens to have their say on the future of Europe. These elections are critically important for shaping the EU's political agenda for the forthcoming term, addressing key issues such as the political stability and security of our continent, upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights within and beyond the borders of the Union, tackling climate change, reinforcing Europe's social model, and prioritising a holistic approach to education, training, and lifelong learning.

The Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) works at the forefront of European education and training. It unites over 40 EU networks that collectively represent over 60,000 educational institutions and associations across Europe, engaged in formal, non-formal, and informal learning. The diversity of LLL's membership is not just a testimony to the scale and diversity of education in Europe, but also highlights a culture of a holistic approach to lifelong learning and advocacy for excellence and inclusivity in education and training at every level.

The upcoming elections will also set the race for the appointment of the new College of European Commissioners, in charge of their respective DGs and policy portfolios. This is why LLL considers the upcoming EU elections to be so crucial for the education and training sectors, as they present an opportunity to elect representatives who will really prioritise educational reform and investment. Enhanced investment in these sectors by the EU and its Member States is essential not only for improving the quality and accessibility of education and training, but also for equipping citizens with the skills necessary to flourish in the evolving green, digital, and demographic landscapes. The next legislative mandate will see a further

deepening of these transitions, and that is why focusing on equality and inclusivity in education and training will be indispensable to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to succeed and thrive in their communities.

This requires unity and cooperation, including in the European Commission, where, unfortunately, we have been observing ongoing bureaucratic rivalry and, at times, inconsistencies between DG EMPL (tasked with enhancing employment, social affairs and labour mobility across the EU) and DG EAC (focused on advancing education, training, youth, and culture), a contention that can be traced back to the inception of the European Employment Strategy in 1997.

Despite each Directorate-General having clear, undisputed areas of responsibility, there has been noticeable tension over policy areas that intersect education and job readiness. This tension has been intensified by frequent shifts in policy focus areas such as lifelong learning, vocational education and training, and skills for the green and digital transitions, among others, between the two DGs. Notably, in the critical initiative of the European Education Area, the initial communication crafted by DG EAC was later revised by DG EMPL, highlighting the rivalry. Additionally, a structural divide and horizontal (rather than vertical) separation exacerbates this competition, as both directorates engage in overlapping policy fields but cater to distinct audiences: DG EAC liaises primarily with public authorities, whereas DG EMPL engages with the private sector. This consolidated practice hides, in fact, a silos approach that is detrimental to policy coherence: education and training encompass formal, non-formal and informal learning. Employability policies that relate to education should be reconducted under a lifelong

learning hat. A good example here is the European Year of Skills, where the involvement of DG EAC was at the lowest level.

This is why when the new Commission is being appointed, it is important that not only progressive candidates, with a track record of fighting for social, inclusive, democratic Europe, are selected to lead respective policy portfolios, but that the actual roles are designed carefully, to promote cooperation and unity across political areas, not least in such a vital sector such as education and training. This is why we call for a creation of a Vice President in the new Commission with a remit for Lifelong Learning. Such a move would help to bridge the nearly three-decade long rivalry between DG EAC and DG EMPL and help identify lifelong learning for what it should be: a strategic and transversal priority for all of Europe. Above all it would bring education and training under the same policy hat, do away with the horizontal separation between the two Directorates, and remove the artificial split-up of skills for jobs and formal education. It would also be an important acknowledgement of the EU decision-makers of their commitment and lasting follow-up to the European Year of Skills, which ends on Europe Day, 9 May 2024 - exactly one month before the EU elections.

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