

Seminar „Making Lifelong Learning a Reality“

Cologne, 7th to 9th March 2004

*Opening speech of Mr Klaus Uckel, Head of Division of Lifelong Learning,
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It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to our seminar on "Making Lifelong Learning a Reality". Thank you for coming. I would like to welcome in particular Mr. Roger O'Keeffe, the representative of the Education and Culture Directorate-General of the European Commission. We are pleased and honoured by the EU's support for this seminar in response to Germany's suggestion that the discussion of various aspects of lifelong learning should be intensified at European level.

The Council decisions of Lisbon and Barcelona underlined the importance which lifelong learning has for our societies, for our economies and for every citizen. Lifelong learning ensures social progress, employability and economic growth. And lifelong learning ensures social integration, personal development and active participation by citizens in supporting democracy in Europe. Lifelong learning can therefore be found in all spheres of social and political life. A concept which is of such fundamental importance deserves our full attention.

Great efforts have been made in recent years to implement the concept of lifelong learning. Although good results have been achieved, at least in Germany, there is still a lot to be done to ensure that every individual is reached and can benefit from lifelong learning. By launching a federal programme entitled "Learning Regions – Providing Support for Networks", Germany has created a strong instrument for meeting the future challenges of our changing national education system. The programme is backed by the German *Länder*, and financial and political support is provided by the European Social Fund.

Our aim is to establish regional education networks and improve regional learning opportunities so that the regions can compete internationally.

We in Germany are aware that we must not ignore one important aspect when implementing our concept of lifelong learning – namely the Europe-wide networking of learning activities and compatibility of learning arrangements. As Europe is growing together, we must engage in exchanges about the development and understanding of lifelong learning, about specific national activities and examples of good practice. By looking beyond our national borders

and by strengthening lifelong learning on a regional basis, we will be able to build a strong Europe which will become one of the most dynamic and competitive economies in the world by 2010.

For this reason, we decided to organize this seminar in order to discuss how to make lifelong learning a reality – a European reality, I would like to add. The title "Making Lifelong Learning a Reality" clearly reflects the programme-oriented approach of the seminar: by considering national solutions in the European context, we want to make a substantial contribution to achieving the goals set in the work programme for 2010.

We expect that the seminar will stimulate the implementation of pilot projects in general and vocational education. In particular, it is to help identify the difficulties and problems that may occur in the development of coherent strategies for implementing lifelong learning and to propose solutions. We hope that the seminar will provide an answer to the question as to what structures would be suited for successfully implementing the educational reforms of individual countries. The planned workshops will provide an opportunity for discussing the goals and developing possible approaches for specific subject areas which will lead to a coherent European strategy for lifelong learning.

The topics to be addressed by the workshops at this seminar reflect the main aspects of implementing the concept of lifelong learning. They will provide a good basis for productive discussions at expert level.

Many problems are still awaiting solution. Implementation of the solutions will then be a national task. I am convinced that your active support and commitment will enable us to identify suitable strategic approaches.

I wish us all a successful seminar.