A4   You hold the keys to Lifelong Learning

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Why do we do this exercise? – an introduction

In November 2005 the European Commission proposed a recommendation on *Key competences for Lifelong Learning*. This recommendation provides, for the first time, a European reference tool on Key competences that, for instance, young people need for further learning and to participate actively in society. With this recommendation, the Commission aimed to encourage and facilitate national debates and reforms of curricula and to develop Lifelong and Lifewide Learning strategies. It was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 18 December 2006.

The Member States of the European Union are acting to modernise their education systems. This might include a shift from just transferring knowledge to developing more transferable competences that equip young people for adult life and further learning. This requires different approaches to organising learning, and new competences from everyone involved in educational processes.

Lifelong and Lifewide Learning implies taking into account the wide range of environments where learning takes place in addition to formal education. Formal, non-formal and informal learning are complementary in this respect. There, the youth field, as one of the main providers of non-formal learning, has an important role to play. Competences acquired in the youth field contribute at a very fundamental level towards personal fulfilment, active participation, employability and the social integration of young people.

This article explains why and how the framework of Key competences was developed and why it is highly relevant for non-formal learning in the youth field, and in particular for the recognition of this learning via instruments such as the Youthpass.

The diversity and complexity of our daily lives demands that in most cases we can't just rush to one single answer, to an either-or solution, but that we have to deal with tensions between aspects that might appear contradictory at first sight or seem to be incompatible. We have to think and act in a more integrated way and constantly take into account a great number of different opinions, ideas or concepts.

Our society depends more and more on knowledge and the provision of information. Therefore the demand for Key competences in personal, public and professional spheres is rising. The way in which people access information and services is changing, as are the structure and make-up of societies. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that everyone needs are changing as a result. They often go far beyond things people usually acquire at school.

What do these demands imply for Key competences that all of us need to acquire? Defining such competences can improve the assessment of whether and how well we are prepared to face current and future challenges.

> ⋯⃗ *How do you perceive learning in a lifelong and lifewide context? What does this provide for young people?*

Proof needed? Please find some data

Within the European Union, there are many examples of successful formal education and training, but at the same time, action to overcome a number of obstacles still needs more effort put into it.

> *One fifth of under 15-year-olds attain only the most basic level of proficiency in reading.*
> *Almost 15 % of 18 – 24-year-olds left school prematurely.*
> *Only 77% of 22-year olds have completed upper secondary education.*
> *Almost a third of the European labour force is low skilled, but according to some estimates, by 2010, 50% of newly created jobs will require highly skilled workers and only 15 % will be for people with basic schooling[1].*

Who cares? - Development

OECD

In late 1997, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development initiated the Definition and Selection of Competencies project. The aim was to provide a sound framework of key competences and to strengthen international surveys measuring the competence levels of young people and adults. This project brought together

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experts from a wide range of disciplines to work with stakeholders and policy analysts to produce a policy-relevant framework.

EU level

In March 2000, heads of states and governments of the European Union stressed that "every citizen must be equipped with the skills needed to live and work in this new information society" and that "a European framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills".

Hence, quite a lot was done to further develop educational systems between 2000 and 2005. In March 2005, the European Council confirmed and relaunched the Lisbon objectives and called again for increased investment in education and skills.

The task now was to focus on identifying the Key competences every citizen should develop throughout life and how, together with traditional skills, they could be better integrated in the curricula, learnt, and maintained throughout our lives. Key competences should be genuinely available to everyone, including those with special needs, school drop-outs and adult learners. Validation of skills and Key competences should be promoted to support further learning and employability.

The work on Key competences is closely linked to other developments in improving European education and training systems such as the ongoing work on the development of a European Qualifications Framework, and initiatives seeking to strengthen and improve understanding and recognition of qualifications and competences acquired in the youth field.

Objectives – What do we want to achieve?

More concretely, objectives at EU level are to:

1) identify and define the Key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society;

2) support Member States' work on ensuring that by the end of initial education and training, young people have developed the Key competences to a level that equips them for adult life;

3) provide with the Key competences for Lifelong Learning a reference tool for policy makers, education providers, employers, and learners themselves to facilitate progress at national and European level.

How progress was made

Based on the political mandate, a working group on basic skills was established in 2001. It was made up of experts from Member States, EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and European associations. Expertise in the group included policy-makers, practitioners and academic researchers, covering both adult and compulsory education and European level stakeholders.

The Working Group preferred the term 'competence' to refer to a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes and 'Key competence' to define competences necessary for all. It thus includes basic skills, but goes beyond them.

The work has been debated at a range of conferences and seminars organised by stakeholders or international organisations. Ministers of Education discussed the 'European dimension' of Key competences at their informal meeting in Rotterdam in July 2004 and encouraged the Commission to continue working on this initiative.

The Recommendation finally proposed in 2005 and based also on the work of the OECD presents a European reference tool for Key competences and suggests how access to these competences can be ensured for all citizens through Lifelong Learning.

To the point – The Key competences framework

The framework sets out eight Key competences:

1. Communication in the mother tongue;
2. Communication in foreign languages;
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
4. Digital competence;
5. Learning to learn;
6. Social and civic competences;
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and
8. Cultural awareness and expression.

In accordance with international studies, 'competence' is defined here as a combination of knowledge, skills and

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attitudes appropriate to a particular situation. 'Key competences' are those that support our personal fulfilment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.

The numbers do not indicate any hierarchy; each of the competences is as important as the other. Many of the competences overlap and interlock: aspects essential to one domain will support competence in another. There are a number of themes that are applied throughout the framework: critical thinking, creativity, initiative taking, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and managing feelings constructively play a role in all eight Key competences. All of them are crucial in the broad scope of learning.

We should develop the Key competences to a level that equips us to lead a satisfying life. The earlier the better, but the process is not a closed one and learning never ends. Key competences should be further developed, maintained and updated as part of Lifelong and Lifewide Learning at any possible opportunity.

Youth exchanges, for instance, foster ability in communication in the mother tongue as well as in a foreign language. Participation in activities in the youth field in general supports the development of social, intercultural and civic competences. To understand the meaning of the Key competences, it can be helpful to imagine a concrete project or event connected to youth work, something that you know very well from your own personal background. Or imagine a traditional youth exchange with 15 or 20 young people from, let's say, the United Kingdom, Poland, Italy and Luxembourg, staying together for 10 days; you might also keep this in mind as an example.
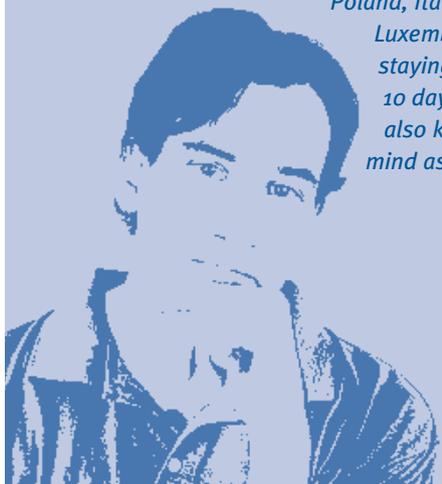
Key Competences

1. Communication in the mother tongue

What: Communication in the mother tongue is our ability to express thoughts, feelings and facts both orally or in writing (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact with other people in an appropriate way in education and training, work, home and leisure.

How: We need to have some knowledge of basic vocabulary and grammar. This includes an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary texts and the main features of different styles and registers of language. We should also be aware that language can be different in different situations.

Competence includes the skills to write and read different types of texts, search, collect and process information, use aids, formulate and express our own arguments in a convincing and appropriate way.

2. Communication in foreign languages

What: Communication in a foreign language is closely linked to communication in our mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand and express thoughts, feelings and facts orally or in writing at work, home, leisure, education and training — according to our wants or needs. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding.

How: We need some knowledge of vocabulary and functional grammar and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of language. Knowledge of the rules of a foreign society and cultural awareness is very important.

We should be able to understand spoken messages and to initiate, sustain and conclude conversations. Reading and understanding of texts according to our needs is important, as well as the skills to use aids and learn languages informally as part of lifelong learning.

A positive attitude involves an appreciation of cultural differences and diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication.

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3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

What: Mathematical competence is our ability to use addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and ratios in mental and written arithmetic to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Process and activity is as important as the knowledge itself.

How: Mathematical competence also involves the ability and willingness to use logical and spatial thinking and the presentation of formulae, models, graphs and charts.

Scientific competence refers to our ability and willingness to use the knowledge and methodology employed to explain the natural world. This is essential in order to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions. Competence in technology is viewed as the application of that knowledge and methodology in response to perceived human wants or needs. Both areas of this competence involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and responsibility as an individual citizen.

> It can also be an exercise in intercultural understanding, to share how we approach mathematical problems, and then try to find common solutions. For example: when you are in a group of people who have been taught in different countries, get them to show you how they work out 25 divided by 9. You will be surprised at just how many different ways everyone writes this down on paper... (Don't allow the use of a calculator!!)

4. Digital competence

What: Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.

How: Digital competence requires a sound understanding and knowledge of the nature, role and opportunities of IST in everyday personal and social life as well as at work. This includes main computer applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, information storage and management, and an understanding of the opportunities of the Internet and communication via electronic media (e-mail, network tools) for leisure, information-sharing and collaborative networking, learning and research.

But the reasonable use of Information Society Technology also requires a critical and reflective attitude towards the information available and responsible use of interactive media.

5. Learning to learn

What: 'Learning to learn' is the ability to organise our own learning. It includes effective management of time and information, both for ourselves and in groups. We should also be aware of our learning process and needs and identify different opportunities available to learn. It means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn encourages us to build on prior learning and life experience.

Learning to learn is more comprehensively explained in this publication in chapter B1 "How to support learning".

6. Social and civic competences

What: These competences might be the most important ones for the youth field. Many of them can be acquired by active engagement in any kind of youth work or volunteering. They cover all forms of behaviour we might need to participate effectively in our social and working lives.

Competences connected to a social context become more important as societies are more diverse now; they can help us to resolve conflicts where necessary. Civic competence equips us to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.

How: Personal and social well-being requires knowledge and understanding of how we and our families can maintain good physical and mental health. For successful interpersonal and social participation, it is essential to understand the codes of conduct and manners generally accepted in different societies and environments (e.g. at work). We need an awareness of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, gender equality, society and culture. It is also important to understand different cultures and how a national cultural identity interacts with European identity.

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Therefore we need skills

> *to communicate in different environments;*

> *to express and understand different viewpoints;*

> *to negotiate and be able to create confidence; and*

> *to feel empathy.*

We need to be able to cope with stress and frustration and to express it in a constructive way and we also need to distinguish between the personal and professional spheres.

It is important to have an interest in socio-economic development, intercultural communication, value diversity and respect others, and be prepared both to overcome prejudices and to compromise.

What else: Civic competence is based on knowledge of the concepts of democracy, citizenship, and civil rights, including how they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international declarations. We should know how these are applied by various institutions at local, regional, national, European and international level.

Knowledge of main events, trends and agents of change in national, European and world history and the present is essential; and in particular specific knowledge of European diversity.

How: We should be able to engage effectively with others in the public domain, and display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. These skills involve critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in our communities or neighbourhoods. They also involve decision-making at all levels from local to national and European level, in particular by voting.

Full respect for human rights, including equality as a basis for democracy, and an appreciation and understanding of differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups lay the foundations for a positive attitude. These skills include showing a sense of belonging to one's locality, country or the EU. Constructive participation also involves civic activities, support for social diversity and cohesion and sustainable development, and a readiness to respect the values and privacy of others.

7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

What: These competences refer to our ability to turn ideas into action which is particulary important for youth work and youth initiatives. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives.

How: For the youth field, it is essential to know what kinds of opportunities are available for specific activities. Our skills should relate to proactive project management (involving skills such as planning, organising, managing, leadership and delegation, analysing, communicating, de-briefing and evaluating and recording). We should be able to work both as individuals and collaboratively in teams. Being able to identify one's strengths and weaknesses, and to assess and take risks as and when warranted is essential.

An entrepreneurial and creative attitude is characterised by initiative, pro-activity, independence and innovation in one's personal and social life, as much as at work. It also includes motivation and determination to meet objectives.

8. Cultural awareness and expression

What: Appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions through a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts.

How: Cultural knowledge includes a basic knowledge of major cultural works, including popular contemporary culture as an important part of human history. It is essential to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and the need to preserve it.

Skills relate to both appreciation and expression. We should be able to express ourselves through a variety of media and as far as we are able with our own abilities and at the same time appreciate and enjoy works of art and performances.

> *If you read the description of the Key competences do you find the potential for learning in a youth exchange described fully? What is missing? How do you offer learning linked to Key competences in your activity?*

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What does it mean to you? – A youth perspective

One of the key issues for modernising education systems is recognising the learner's particular situation: their prior experiences, learning needs and aspirations should be taken into account, as well as broader issues that link to social and employment policies, and require the engagement of all partners.

Non-formal and informal learning activities within the youth field are shaped by a specific type of learning which has been developed over years and takes into account the current situation of young people in societies. In particular, non-formal and informal learning activities within the European youth field are based on intercultural principles which support learning and improve communication between people who come from different backgrounds.

The work and achievements of young people and those active in youth work and youth organisations deserve greater recognition in order to enhance their value and visibility, and should be given due consideration by employers, formal education establishments and civil society in general.

The youth field contributes in many various ways to the acquisition of Key competences for Lifelong and Lifewide Learning. Participation in activities in the youth field in general supports the development of social and civic competences. Youth initiatives active at local level give young people the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, youth work contributes in different ways to the acquisition of all other competences in a comprehensive and sustainable way.

As a result of inequities in earlier stages of education, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often do not achieve the level of qualifications needed to easily access the labour market or higher education. Policies to reinforce efficiency and equity of education systems, therefore, have to combine all available forms of learning to facilitate easier access. Typical non-formal learning approaches, such as mentoring programmes, guidance and counselling, are crucial and should be provided early.

The persistently high level of youth unemployment in the EU is a serious problem. Labour market entrants with the lowest levels of educational achievement face the highest risks of unemployment. A cross-sectoral approach that provides better coordination of formal, non-formal and informal learning would facilitate smoother transitions from school to work.

And how to go on?

Through the Key competences recommended by the European Union, a debate on what competences each young person should develop has been initiated. Social aspects of learning have been given a more important role: as educational disadvantages are often a combination of personal, social, cultural and economic circumstances, they need to be tackled in collaboration with other sectors.

The youth field has an important role to play in supporting young people's learning. The Key competences offer an opportunity to foster the discussion within the youth field and to contribute to a wider discussion in the field of education.

The European Pact for Youth identifies employment and social inclusion as key concerns and as major priorities on which to concentrate in order to enable young people to play an active role in society. Non-formal and informal learning contribute essentially to the personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability of young people. The Pact is an important tool within the Lisbon Strategy for reaching the major goal of including all young people in society. It is crucial that young people and their organisations are key partners, together with other stakeholders, in the follow-up process and should be closely involved in implementing the European Youth Pact and in its impact on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the youth field.

Youthpass is based on the Key competences framework which marks important progress towards more comprehensive recognition of learning outcomes in the youth field at European level. The Commission, together with the Member States and relevant stakeholders, is currently developing a broader approach that goes beyond the Youth in Action Programme and includes different forms of learning in the youth field from local to European level. One of the pre-conditions for this work will be a basic description of the contribution of the youth field to the acquisition of Key competences for Lifelong Learning.

> ·····⫸ *What do you think the contribution of the youth field is to the Key competences in general and to each individual Key competence?*

[1] Commission Staff Working Paper: Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training 2005 Report SEC (2005) 419, Brussels, 22.3.2005