EUROPEAN E-SKILLS 2006 CONFERENCE

5-6 October 2006, Thessaloniki, Greece

DECLARATION

The potential contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) to our economy and society in the long term remains huge. The success of the Lisbon strategy, the competitiveness of European industry and social cohesion are dependent on the effective use of ICT and the knowledge, skills, competences and inventiveness of the European workforce and its ICT practitioners;

As ICT is developing rapidly and exponentially, e-skills need to be constantly updated. This is best achieved by regular learning and use while individuals are at work. In this context, e-learning could play an important role;

Industry and policy makers should be encouraged to act more decisively and consistently (despite short term hiccups due to business cycles or financial bubbles) regarding their strategies to promote the professionalism, the image and the attractiveness of ICT practitioners' jobs and careers as well as to foster better employment conditions and perspectives;

Efforts need to be made to improve co-operation between the public and the private sectors on a balanced and long term basis and to ensure a seamless framework linking basic e-skills training, vocational and higher education and professional development for the benefit of the workforce;

It remains essential for the European Union to adopt a long term and consistent e-skills agenda to promote competitiveness, employability and workforce development and respond to global competitive pressure.

THE EUROPEAN E-SKILLS 2006 CONFERENCE:

Recognises the contribution of the organisations which have steered the preparation of this event, notably CEDEFOP and leading ICT companies active within the eSCC and the ICT Task Force established by the European Commission on 6 June 2006;

Welcomes the report of the Working Group on skills and employability of the ICT Task Force and supports its analysis and recommendations;

Welcomes the Ministerial Declaration on e-inclusion adopted on 11 June 2006 in Riga;

Invites the European Commission to develop in 2007 a long term agenda for improving "e-Skills for Competitiveness, Employability and Workforce development"; and an initiative on "e-Inclusion" in 2008 as indicated in the i2010 initiative;

Invites EU Institutions, Member States and stakeholders to work actively together to prepare and subsequently to implement a long term e-skills agenda in the spirit of the co-operation and dialogue initiated in the European e-Skills Forum;

Recognises that the way forward towards the widening and deepening of e-skills within the EU is through involvement of all actors from government, industry, social partners and academia in multi-stakeholder dialogue and partnerships for action;

Calls upon all relevant stakeholders to support the following actions and to include them in a long term e-skills agenda:

IMPROVING THE AVAILABILITY OF E-SKILLS

- Encourage the setting-up by the ICT industry of an **Industry Leadership Group** to facilitate e-skills information and co-operation and pool resources to launch and further develop initiatives such as the "European Alliance on Skills for Employability" launched early 2006 by the eSCC[i] and the development of industry-based strategies on human resources development to make ICT professions more attractive;
- Promote[ii] ICT practitioner education in a long term perspective and an innovative and worldwide environment and improve the integration of **industry-based ICT curricula and certifications** into formal education, with a focus on tertiary education and vocational training. When necessary and the openness is guaranteed, ICT industry training material in relevant technical aspects should be included in curricula and corresponding ICT industry certifications recognised;
- Develop[iii] **new e-competence curriculum guidelines** and standards to facilitate the mutual recognition of training, transparency of qualifications and credit transfer between formal, non formal and industry education and training;
- Establish and maintain a **European e-Skills and Career portal**, involving all relevant stakeholders, to promote transparency regarding different qualifications, improve mobility, and make ICT career pathways more attractive;
- Develop **European quality criteria for e-skills training and certifications** according to ICT workforce requirements and in a vendor neutral environment;
- Ensure compatibility of the **EU-wide e-competence framework** (to be developed in line with the European Qualifications Framework) with formal and non-formal ICT practitioner and user education and certifications and also with business and ICT competences required to implement best practice in the global economy;
- Consider new forms of attractive **part-time and flexible working practices** to attract ICT workers including women and mature professionals;
- Research and promote the adoption of **appropriate legal and financial frameworks for multi-stakeholder partnerships** related to e-skills development;
- Increase public and private sector investment in human resources and, where appropriate, consider **financial support** and **incentives** related to ICT training that can be accessed by individuals throughout their career and as part of this process, also assess the effectiveness of existing provisions related to financial instruments[iv];
- Research and promote coherent policies related to the granting of **immigration visas** for e-skills workers;

EMPOWERING FUTURE GENERATIONS

- Promote **science, maths and ICT, role models, ICT job profiles and career perspectives** with a special emphasis on young people;
- Organise **awareness and information campaigns** to provide parents, teachers and pupils with an accurate understanding of opportunities arising from an ICT education and the pursuit of a career as an ICT professional;
- **Improve career advice and guidance opportunities in and around schools** and provide better and more frequent training to career consultants;
- Improve **teachers' and trainers professional development** to equip them with e-skills and promote the integration of ICT enabled learning in Member States' education and training strategies to make ICT an effective and integrated part of teaching and learning;
- Promote best practice on multi-stakeholder partnerships which expose individuals and SMEs **to entrepreneurial skills;**

BOOSTING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF THE WORKFORCE

- Encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships[v] between leading providers of e-skills training knowledge and resources and providers of wider business skills training and job placement support services in order to help **connect trainees to new jobs**;
- Investigate how public funding mechanisms can **upscale and maximise the impact of successful multi-stakeholder initiatives**[vi] in delivering e-skills training and certification; and in improving the employability of job seekers and low skilled workers in order to increase participation and to combat social exclusion;
- **Remove barriers for funding education and training** which stand in the way of schools, universities and training organisations offering ICT industry curricula and certification through which it is possible to develop both basic and advanced 'job-ready' e-skills in the workforce[vii];
- Develop pragmatic approaches to **reducing the e-skills gap between larger organisations and SMEs**, notably for smaller SMEs and the less ICT-oriented SME sectors;
- Develop digital literacy and competence actions tailored to the **needs of groups at risk of exclusion**, notably the unemployed, immigrants, people with low education levels, people with disabilities, the elderly and marginalised young people.

MAKING A GREATER AND BETTER USE OF E-LEARNING FOR THE LIFE LONG ACQUISITION OF SKILLS

- Maintain and where appropriate increase **support and investment in educating and training employees of SMEs in both basic and professional e-skills** and in ways to use ICT for learning, while promoting more generalised positive attitude towards learning at individual, team and organisational levels;

- Promote **e-learning courses** and **brokerage mechanisms** that support the exchange of online e-skills resources for ICT practitioners and the European workforce; and contribute to the development of a more dynamic and competitive market for e-learning products and services;
- Support the **networking of e-learning and training centres in co-operation with the European Network of Living Labs**[viii]. These will facilitate piloting and validation processes and contribute to a better understanding of future e-skills needs;
- Monitor good practice across Europe for the training of SME employees using e-learning in order to promote the most **successful e-learning solutions and business models;**
- Formulate **a vision and recommendations for ambitious e-learning policies** and promote the adoption of clear policy targets notably in relation to the use by SME personnel of ICT and e-learning.

PROMOTING VISIBILITY AND MONITORING PROGRESS

- Analyse regularly the evolution of the **supply and demand of e-skills** in Europe and provide common standards for **EU-wide statistics and foresight analyses** relating to e-skills;
- Monitor the positioning of the EU in the global economy and the impact of **global sourcing** on job profiles and occupations and support multi-stakeholder partnership efforts to develop a sustainable offshore outsourcing model across the EU;
- Review how **EU programmes and funding instruments**, in liaison with national and regional funding sources, might be used more efficiently to support the concrete actions described above, including both the dissemination of information as well as the adoption of good practice and as part of this process further promote the accessibility of all available funding instruments;
- Maintain a **virtual e-skills community** and produce a **quarterly** newsletter; and investigate how emerging **Web 2.0 technologies and tools** can help promote ICT training and careers to a new generation of "digital natives";
- Organise a **European e-Skills Conference** every two years in partnership with stakeholders to discuss progress and the way forward (2008 and 2010).

www.e-skills-conference.org

The European e-Skills Conference is organised by the European Commission
in co-operation with CEDEFOP and in partnership with leading companies from the ICT Industry
(eSCC, Cisco Systems, CompTIA, ECDL Foundation, Microsoft, EXIN)

Endnotes:

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[i] eSCC: e-Skills Certification Consortium.

[ii] Within the framework of Member States' respective political, legal, budgeting, educational and training systems

[iii] Same remark as endnote ii

[iv] This could be considered as a concrete measure in the broader context of the promotion of lifelong learning.

[v] The ICT industry, local and regional job centres, Chambers of Commerce and Federations of SMEs etc.

[vi] In line with the Guidelines for the Employment Policies of Member States (2005/600/EC, 12 July 2005)

[vii] Same remark as endnote ii

[viii] In the i2010 Communication and the first Annual Report on the European Information Society, a European Network of Living Labs is one of the actions for the second cluster for Investment and Innovation in Research. The Finnish Presidency will launch the European Network of Living Labs in November, 2006. The role of the network is to support efficient R&D processes through close interaction with end-users. The services of the network help e-learning and training centres to find, analyse and target the most relevant and important eLearning issues, in direct collaboration with the users.