



European Forum for Freedom in Education
Europäisches Forum für Freiheit im Bildungswesen

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Dear *effe* members,

Just in time for the arrival of Spring, here is the latest *effe* newsletter with news from Brussels and our members.

We hope you have fun reading and we look forward to seeing you at our next *effe* conference, taking place in beautiful Vienna from the 28th-30th April. You can find more information about the conference under 'News'.

Have fun and enjoy the first few days of sunshine of the new year!

Best wishes from Brussels.

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Project Officer at the EU Office, Brussels
effe website in German

"Different Pathways into Learning" **Lifelong Learning Fair at the European Parliament** **14th-18th March 2011**

The European Forum for Freedom in Education (*effe*) was one of a number of organisations which took part in the "Different Pathways into Learning" Fair from 14th-18th March 2011 at the European Parliament in Brussels. As well as a temporary exhibition, events organised



Anne Liekenbrock (left), Director of *effe* and Josh Tebbutt (right) Project Officer for *effe* at *effe*'s information stand in the European Parliament.

throughout the 'Lifelong Learning week' included a roundtable discussion on "The Social Dimension of Education and Training", a public hearing on Mobility and meetings with Parliament and Commission representatives. The aim of the week was to raise the profile of Lifelong Learning and the visibility of the work of the organisations in that field as well as provide a forum of discussion for the future of Lifelong Learning in the European Union.

The temporary exhibition on Lifelong Learning was one of the main focuses of the week. Participants from over 20 organisations set up information stands presenting their organisations and various projects concerning Lifelong

Learning. MEPs, Assistants, Parliament employees and other visitors to the exhibition wandered freely amongst the stands talking to organisation representatives and learning more about their activities in the educational and training sectors. It proved a good opportunity to meet people and establish a wide variety of contacts. Free hand massages were also offered at the exhibition to attract passers-by who wished for a relaxing, paraffin-smothered and glove-bound 5 minutes whilst looking at the displays.

On Tuesday lunchtime, around 30 organisation representatives met with **Pierre Mairesse**, the Head of Directorate A for Lifelong Learning at the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), at the EUCIS-LLL offices close to the European



Pierre Mairesse, Head of Directorate A for Lifelong Learning, Directorate General for Education Culture, 15th March 2011

Parliament. Mr. Mairesse underlined the importance of Lifelong Learning to the European Commission and the work of the various organisations in this area. He mentioned how the Commission is active in

this area through various flagship initiatives, such as 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs', 'Digital Agenda' and 'Youth on the Move' for example. He explained how the inclusion of non-formal and informal education, a Commission Communication on Lifelong Learning and an expanded mobility scheme on skills would all be part of the Commission's future agenda on Lifelong Learning.

A Roundtable event, hosted by **Maria Badia i Cutchet** MEP (S&D), took place in the European Parliament over Wednesday lunchtime and was attended by several key decision-makers from the European Parliament. A large part of the discussions

focused on the current or imminent funding cuts in European Union member states and the challenges that they will pose to the future of education and training schemes. Ms Badia opened the event, voicing her appreciation for the ideas and efforts of the Lifelong Learning Week. She underlined the importance of education for the future competitiveness of Europe and stressed in particular, the importance of adult education. **Natalya**



Gina Ebner, President of EUCIS-LLL (left) and Doris Pack, MEP (right) at the Roundtable event in the European Parliament, 16th March 2011

Gryazeva from the 'Education and Science Workers' Trade Union' in Latvia, **Fionnvala Richardson** from 'The People's College' in Ireland and **David Lopez** of 'La Ligue de l'Enseignement' in France all warned of the

impact of austerity measures on every level of the education sector, from early childhood to university education. They agreed that it is those from a disadvantaged background, who are illiterate or who live in hard-to-reach areas (e.g. rural areas) who are most risk. Following the representatives from various civil society organisations, MEPs active in the area of education and



Elisabeth Schroedter MEP (Greens/EFA) (left) and Mary Honeyball MEP (S&D) (right) at the Round Table event in the European Parliament, 16th March 2011

training spoke to the group. **Doris Pack** MEP (EPP), Chair of the European Parliament's Culture and Education (CULT) Committee, explained how there was enthusiasm amongst Committee members in the area of education. society organisations. Better structure and better teachers were part of her suggested solution to produce better skilled individuals. **Elisabeth Schroedter** MEP (Greens/EPA), Vice-Chair of the Committee of Employment and Social Affairs, suggested that education and training were the most important ways to create jobs in the current economic climate. She reiterated that the message from the EU to member states should be that of continued funding. **Mary Honeyball** MEP (S&D), member of the CULT committee and rapporteur of the recent "Early Years Learning in the European Union"¹ report, characterised the budget cuts to education and training programmes as "very short-sighted" and "not at all sensible". She

believes that the EU has a large role to play in the recovery process. **Marie-Christine Vergiat** MEP (GUE), who worked closely with the organisation of the Lifelong Learning 'Fair, placed youth employment



Opening address from Marie-Christine Vergiat (right) MEP (GUE) at the cocktail reception for Lifelong Learning on 16th March 2011

and the need to fight inequality at the centre of her call for action. **Jeff Bridgford**, Special Advisor from the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), emphasised the need for highly skilled workers in Europe and called for greater flexibility and cooperation between the training and professional domains to encourage adult training.

Gyula Hegyi, Member of the Cabinet of Commissioner László, was present representing the European Commission. He mentioned several of the EU flagship initiatives and communications which aim to create jobs and target particularly vulnerable groups. He cited the European Structural Fund as an important means of ensuring the promotion of new skills. The Roundtable event was brought to a close by **Gina Ebner**, President of EUCIS-LLL, calling for the mainstreaming of good practices and the continued funding of good projects on a long term basis.

In the evening, participants, invitees of the

various organisations and people from the European Parliament attended a cocktail reception for Lifelong Learning. Marie-Christine Vergiat MEP and Gina Ebner made some brief remarks at the opening of the reception both thanking the organisers of the Lifelong Learning week and calling for more work to be done in the area of recognition and the promotion of Lifelong Learning.

Whilst the temporary exhibition continued to attract visitors, a public hearing on transnational mobility was held on Thursday afternoon at the European Economic and Social Committee and chaired by **Joke van der Leuw-Roord**, President and Executive Director of EUROCLIO – the European Association

of History Educators. The Public Hearing sought to deal with issues, such as the benefits of mobility schemes, their effectiveness in addressing target groups and possible improvements to the schemes.



Anne Liekenbrock, Director of *effe*, sitting for a filmed interview with EUCIS-LLL.

improved language and communication skills, improved 'soft skills' and greater cultural awareness as potential benefits to the individual participant of a mobility scheme whilst overall, such programmes can contribute to European integration. Budgetary restraints and fear (of different cultures, environments or of having insufficient [foreign] language skills) could however, undermine or inhibit mobility.

They believed that for these schemes to progress in the future there must be greater awareness, a more holistic approach that combines formal and non-formal learning and long-term and secure financing setup. Joke van der Leeuw-Roord brought the Public Hearing to a close, calling for continued support for Lifelong Learning. She stated that political will on all levels needs to be stimulated, the



Temporary Exhibition, "Different Pathways to Learning" in the European Parliament 14th-18th March 2011

administration of the schemes needs to be simplified and the potential of new media should be explored to ensure that individuals are aware of the different programmes and are able to participate in them if they so wish.

After a busy week of events and visitors, the exhibition in the European Parliament

was well attended and has undoubtedly helped improve visibility of the organisations taking part and the work they are involved in. *effe* hopes that the events this week have helped to strengthen the ongoing dialogue between civil society organisations and the institutions of the European Union; this exchange is crucial to the development and implementation of future EU programmes, schemes and policies.

Learning can be an invaluable instrument for self-development, wherever and in which ever form it takes place. Fostering a desire and enthusiasm to learn in every child from an early age can prove to be a lifelong source of motivation and empowerment. The effects are enduring and far-reaching not only to the individual but to a society as a whole. Since schools are well-placed to begin this process and we must work to help them create learning environments out of which a lifelong positive attitude towards learning is born. *effe* hopes that this message has been, and will continue to be heard at every level to the benefit of all the citizens of Europe.

You can find more photos from the event on our Facebook page [here](#).

¹ See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+COMPART+PE-454.668+02+DOC+PDF+V0//>

***effe* response to the European Commission's "Consultation on non-formal and informal learning" - February 2011**

The 'European Forum for Freedom in Education' (*effe*) is an NGO in the area of compulsory education. We see our organisation as a forum in which current issues concerning education in Europe can be discussed. Our members are interested and active citizens from the educational

sector; that includes teachers, schools, school-organisations, administrators and those involved in university life. All members of *effe* stand for the right to education and for the promotion of diversity and freedom in education.

effe believes that non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) must play a greater role in European society. It can contribute to an individual's personal development, the promotion of social cohesion and be a means of combating social exclusion. **NFIL can be a powerful tool at every level in European society and should be used as such.**

effe welcomes the work and progress already made by the European Union in this area, including the explicit calls in the Europe 2020 strategy to promote “*the recognition of non-formal and informal learning*” as well as the ‘Youth on the Move’ and ‘Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’ flagship initiatives. However, it believes there is much more to be done if the full potential of NFIL is to be realised. *effe* is glad therefore to see this timely and important consultation.

Formal learning is widely acknowledged and enjoys a privileged status; the historical legacy from when (formal) education was one of the few ways of guaranteeing a better quality of life. However, experience has shown that formal education systems can not cater for all and there are many who are not well suited to this set-up to learning. The universality and lifelong dimension of NFIL play an essential complementary role in this regard and combined with formal education presents the possibility of reaching those of all ages and backgrounds. Its inherent informality means that NFIL has the potential to reach out to sections of society not normally catered for by more formalised learning frameworks. **NFIL offers the opportunity to re-engage sections of society which feel estranged or marginalised from mainstream society.** With an expanding Union and an increasingly globalised world,

Europe needs a means of addressing the issues presented by the movement of people both within and outside of the EU; NFIL can be one of those means.

In this vein, **the potential that NFIL has alongside formal education to foster social cohesion and help combat social exclusion is considerable.** It can help to build bridges and overcome prejudices. NFIL offers marginalised groups, including the Roma people for example, an additional and alternative pathway from formal education and with this, a means to reintegrate into mainstream society. As a means of bringing people together, NFIL can greatly contribute to the integration of communities and the social cohesion of societies as a whole.

However, one of the main obstacles to progressing on any aspect of NFIL is the lack of awareness on nearly every side, from the individual and private enterprises up to local, regional and national governments.

A targeted campaign to improve awareness of the benefits and skills gained from NFIL should be undertaken. **The recognition and status of NFIL should be promoted across the whole of the European Union.** This can start at the earliest stages during early childhood education and continue throughout every stage of a person's lifetime. The use of media and promotional literature informing people of all ages of the opportunities for NFIL in their local area could be an effective start to this out reach process.

In today's society, NFIL are often overlooked as valuable assets to an individual's profile within the world of work. This is an issue on both sides of the professional relationship. Individuals need to be equipped with the ability to recognise and identify the skills they have acquired through NFIL as well as the tools to

‘translate’ them into language appropriate for the employment sector. Those entering the employment market for the first time or those re-entering after a period away should receive particular help in this area. In the same way, employers should be made aware of the benefits of NFIL and be prepared to take them into equal consideration with formal educational achievement.

The benefits would be felt on both sides; once aware of the complementary skills gained through NFIL employers would be more likely to take them into account when considering a candidate for a position. Similarly, individuals aware of the benefits of NFIL will be more likely to participate in it, be it for their own personal development or to improve their employment prospects. Ignorance of opportunity is an unacceptable yet avoidable obstacle in helping those most in need of the benefits of NFIL. **By spreading the message and promoting the profile of NFIL, we can ensure that it is possible for everyone to take advantage of those opportunities available to them.**

For this to function on a European level *effe* agrees that it would be useful to have some form of framework for recognition and validation. **In a globalised world and an ever closer Union, it is important that skills are internationally transferable and recognised.** If an over-arching system for recording skills acquired from NFIL is to be established, it should be done on the lowest functional level possible. In other words, **the corresponding documentation should testify to the completion of an activity which involved NFIL rather than attempt to fully qualify and quantify the individual skills attained.** There is the danger that by “*issuing a formal recognised certificate/qualification*”¹ after having

assessed “*the levels of knowledge, skills and competence the individual possesses*”, non-formal and informal learning would become formalised. This has the potential to undermine the essence and worth of the NFIL. Indeed, some NFIL is not necessarily undertaken for the purpose of ‘learning outcomes’ nor can the (sometimes implicit) benefits of it ever be quantifiably measured or tested in this way.

effe has concerns that a system of “*issuing a formal recognised certificate/qualification*” would experience similar difficulties in reaching the marginalised groups of society as the formal education system sometimes does. Combined with formal education, NFIL is in the privileged position of being able to extend its reach to increased numbers of people. **With designs of identifying and testing those skills acquired through NFIL to the point of issuing formal certification, there is the risk of jeopardising the enhanced accessibility and effectiveness of NFIL and in turn diminishing the degree to which it can ably complement formal education.** The question of validation is an important one but one which presents particular difficulties in its execution.

Above all, NFIL requires sufficient funding if it is to be a success. Without financial support at national and local levels, equity of access to NFIL will be undermined and schemes which offer the opportunity for NFIL will not be able to reach those most in need of its benefits. Governments at local, regional and national level should be willing to invest in this area once they are made aware of the social benefits of NFIL. Civil society and private enterprise which are often already active members in this area will also be encouraged to further engage to commit financial support. For this to happen though requires the **initial political will and financial drive.** The European Union is well

placed to take a leading role in this area. With awareness comes understanding and subsequently the opportunity to mobilise financial backing even in this challenging economic climate.

Understandably, not all activities which result in some form of NFIL can be free at the point of need. However, there are many existing examples of programmes run by civil society organisations or indeed publically-funded projects which are successful at reaching out to marginalised or excluded groups of society. It is imperative that these projects and new ones receive the funding they require to continue their work. In this respect, it is possible to **ensure equity of access to NFIL**.

In light of the benefits of NFIL outlined here, **it is important that NFIL becomes a fully integrated part of learning as a whole within the European Union**. There is an urgent need for improved awareness and greater recognition of NFIL. Alongside formal education, NFIL can develop a person's self-confidence, self-awareness, awareness of others as well as their practical and social skills. **It presents us with the opportunity to further promote social cohesion and help combat social exclusion in an increasingly diverse**

Europe. Though the economic situation is difficult, financial support for programmes which offer NFIL will be forthcoming once there is a clear understanding of what NFIL has to offer.

The European Union is an increasingly populous and diverse place. Society is forever evolving and with it, so too do the social issues which confront it. *effe* strongly believes that alongside formal education, NFIL can and should be one of the main tools to promote a more secure and cohesive Europe. From individual and personal development, to a more flexible and inclusive employment sector and a society with a greater understanding for itself and others, NFIL can help make a truly inclusive European Union and accordingly strengthen its position in the global community.

Signed by,

Eva Becker, President
Fiona Carnie, Vice-President
Ingo Krampen, Chair of the Board
Anne Liekenbrock, Director

¹ Background note to accompany public consultation on the promotion and validation of NFIL, p.1

REGISTER NOW!

***effe* Conference 'EducationSPRING'**

effe Austria and *effe* international are hosting an 3 day event entitled "Education SPRING" from the 28th-30th April 2011 at the Werkstätten- und Kulturhaus (WUK) in Vienna, Austria. The event seeks to throw light on alternative education, including the latest developments and education

policies from across Europe, through a series of lectures, workshops, discussion groups and events.

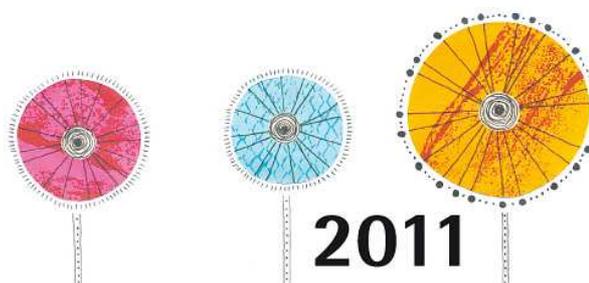
A Forum, 'Experience World' and Symposium will run parallel events over the three days on a wide variety of topics. For

example, the Forum will look to address subjects including “Education Today”, “Democratic Education” and “Education through connection”. Small discussion groups and performances from various organisations will provide a great opportunity to debate and discuss alternative education policies.

Visitors to the ‘Experience World’ will be able to experience first-hand different education ideas and concepts through installations and interactive activities. Alternative schools and children/youth groups from the local area will have stands at the event. The ‘Forum theatre’, ‘Dance and juggling’ performances and ‘School tours’ will certainly create a lively atmosphere for all there to enjoy.

The Symposium hopes to take a closer look at different practices and on-going developments in the alternative education sector. Under the guidance of experts and specialists, participants will be able to get

involved with some intensive debate and analysis through workshops, discussion groups, the ‘World Café’ and role plays.



Intriguingly, there will be the opportunity to reflect on what quality education in the future should look like. Speakers and representatives come from a broad and diverse set of backgrounds and as with any *effe* conference, debate is likely to be lively, interesting and we hope, enlightening. If you are interested in attending this event, please find more information on the website at <http://bildungsfuehling.wordpress.com> – we look forward to seeing you there!

Adoption of the Written Declaration

In February’s newsletter, *effe* published its statement of support for the “Written Declaration on establishing a European Statute for Mutuals, Associations and Foundations”. Thanks to the hard work



of the many organisations and associations involved in this campaign, the written declaration has now been adopted by the

European Parliament following the signature of 381 MEPs. Whilst this is only the first step, it is an important move towards the greater support and recognition of civil society associations and the work they do. *effe* was proud to have been involved in this campaign and is pleased by its success. You can find out more by visiting the EASEA website, the alliance of European associations which coordinated the campaign, (<http://www.easea.eu/>) and read our own statement on our website at <http://effe-eu.org/images/Newsletter/easea.pdf>.

Project Officer in EU Office

effe is delighted to announce that Josh Tebbutt, who is currently coming towards the end of his internship with the

EU office in Brussels, is to continue working for effe from April onwards as a Project Officer.

effe website in German

The newly re-designed effe website (www.effe-eu.org), whose launch was reported in the previous effe newsletter, is now available in German. On the website you can find the latest news from effe, the latest developments in EU education policy and download current and past effe publications such as Newsletters.



Editorial:

Anne Liekenbrock (content)

Elisabeth Köpke

Joshua Tebbutt (intern)