



CYPRUS PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Cyprus Presidency Conference "Literacy for All"

Nicosia, 5-6 September 2012

Description of the Workshop 5

Workshop 5 – Adults

Low levels of literacy among adults are still a taboo subject and a largely ignored problem in European societies. Along with a lack of national and European-level data on this issue, individuals with low levels of literacy often feel ashamed about their shortcomings and try to hide them from their families, friends and employers. Therefore, there is a pressing need to raise awareness of literacy problems among adults.

Increasing adults' literacy levels is likely to result in positive outcomes for individuals themselves, but also for society in general. Adults with improved literacy skills have better self-esteem, feel more empowered, and have better health and higher rates of social and civic participation. In addition, improved literacy levels allow adults to better adapt to the growing labour market demands for high skills and to be part of the increasingly literacy dependent digital world and avail of eGovernment, eCommerce and social media, etc.

However, adults need to be supported to recognize and address their literacy difficulties and to improve their skills. In this regard, adult education in its diverse settings and the workplace constitute the most relevant contexts.

Adult education and training can provide a safe and supportive environment for the development of literacy skills. High quality teaching, specialized teachers, courses tailored to the specific needs of adults and activities closely related to real life tasks and challenges are more likely to increase adults' motivation and to help them overcome previous negative experiences in the school system. In addition, validating competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning is also essential to improve the motivation to learn. Persistence is an important issue given the many competing priorities in the busy lives of most adults. Programmes must therefore be long enough to bring results but flexible enough to enable multiple stops and starts.

The workplace and employers have an important role in supporting and providing specialized courses or training to improve workers' literacy skills. This is also likely to benefit the companies and employers themselves through increases in productivity, a greater use of new technologies in the workplace and lower staff turnover. But equally there is a role for libraries and NGOs in outreach and provision of adult literacy.

Questions

- a) What measures are needed at both EU and national levels to raise awareness of literacy problems among adults? What action can be taken to break the stigma of adult illiteracy, provide individuals seeking help with specialized support and guidance, and programmes tailored to their needs, ?
- b) In respect of any good examples of adult literacy courses/training in your country, what factors contribute most to their success? What are the main outcomes of these courses/training for individuals and for the local community?
- c) How can we raise the awareness of employers of the importance and benefits of promoting literacy courses/training for employees and encourage them to take responsibility for the literacy of their employees and give them access to high-quality literacy training? What other main stakeholders should be mobilised?