

Executive summary

WHITE PAPER ON LIFELONG LEARNING

1. Lifelong learning is gradually revealing itself as a major instrument in the European Union's bid to achieve the **strategic objective set in March 2000 by the European Council of Lisbon**, which involves converting the EU, in the current decade, into the world's most competitive, dynamic knowledge-based economy, capable of growing economically in a sustainable way with more and better employment and greater social cohesion. The European Union emphasises the fundamental importance of investment in human resources and the need for modern, efficient educational and training systems, which are in turn given further backing and complemented by the common, transversal policy factor of lifelong learning. Using the **open method of coordination**, both the EU and the member states, and by extension the regions too, will have to coordinate their efforts and intensify the attention given to, among other things, human resources development.

2. Lifelong learning has thus become a **key factor in the knowledge-based economy** and the information society. EU citizens must be provided with the tools they need to meet the challenges of technological innovation, of changes in the forms of production and business transformations and to participate actively in society. The actual process of adapting to the information society ought to work against the risk of exclusion that might arise were a large part of the population to miss out on the technological developments of the day, thereby becoming digital illiterates subject to a new form of exclusion.

3. To avoid a situation of this kind, a new **global approach in education and training** is required; an approach that coherently and integrally meets the new challenges of the knowledge-based society and economy. *Lifelong learning aims to cover all aspects of education and training, including non-formal aspects, throughout people's lives.*

4. Integral lifelong learning policy has a **triple dimension**: innovation, social inclusion and an active citizenship. Lifelong learning aims to provide the active population with the basic skills of the knowledge-based society and the tools and instruments needed to exploit **technological innovation**. Lifelong learning can also help to attract people trapped in non-active situations towards some kind of economic activity. Lifelong learning is also a vital tool for **social inclusion**; people can be given greater levels of autonomy and helped to take decisions and shoulder responsibility for designing their own life projects and for their personal and professional development. In this respect, underprivileged people should be given special attention. Lifelong learning also favours the creation of an **active citizenship**: by strengthening the critical spirit, it helps to greater understanding of society, of people's and citizens' rights and duties, and of the way local, regional, state and European institutional, political and economic systems function. People can thus more effectively influence the decisions that directly affect them, thereby promoting their participation in, among other entities, social and cultural associations, political parties, trade unions, non-profit-making organisations, NGOs and the mass media.

5. A lifelong learning strategy must provide **support for people**: quality information, assessment and mediation and the design of itineraries enabling them to acquire the basic skills

required by the knowledge-based society. The training offer should be adapted to people's needs and not the other way round.

6. So a new learning culture appears in which **potentially the whole of society is involved**. Together with educational institutions, a whole range of organisations, associations, businesses and centres that until now had not seen themselves as educational have now understood their role as learning facilitator organisations. They have also become jointly involved in promoting the acquisition of basic universal skills, skill certification or accreditation, the balance of learning needs, the design of itineraries, materials and methodologies (particularly those that involve eLearning), access to learning, financing the cost of learning and improving investments in human resources, the inclusion of new technologies, educational guidance, mediation and tutorisation, geographical mobility (including language learning) and the development of local learning centres.

7. The new challenges posed by lifelong learning in all its dimensions entail a **new approach to the formulas used to finance** learning and the need to assure transparency in financing through public resources and their distribution — whether via taxes, European structural funds, community programmes or social contributions. In this context, all interested public, semi-public and private parties will have to shoulder their share of the responsibility in financing the learning process.

8. Areas that promote learning for all become **learning territories**: cities, regions or countries for learning. As in other European regions, the range of initiatives introduced by the Basque authorities, through several regional government departments, are now to be grouped under the new lifelong learning umbrella. Significant initiatives have been introduced in several areas of action (e.g., in the Basque Vocational Training Plan, in the information and communications technology [ICT] plan, in the orientation and guidance plan, in the basic training programme and the regional Science & Technology Plan) which may now be included in the new Lifelong Learning paradigm. The one thing that has so far prevented the Basque Country from becoming a fully-fledged learning region is a global policy, a coherent strategy on lifelong learning for all and the White Paper proposing such a strategy.

9. This strategy must be conceived for the whole of Basque society and by **all Basque institutions, with the participation of civil society**. This is because powers in lifelong learning-related issues such as education and training, culture, innovation, information society, social inclusion and employment are broadly distributed. Further, these institutions share out substantial resources for such issues, with the strategy paying special attention to the territory as the binding factor for any potential synergies in lifelong learning: partenariats between civil society, organisations and institutions.

10. If everyone working in education, learning and cultural activities adopts the lifelong learning vision, upholds a coherent discourse and implements initiatives leading to the design, in their own territory, of authentic learning maps and learning and knowledge centres for all, if all Basque institutions accept as their mission that they should facilitate access to learning for everyone, then the vision of **the Basque Country as a learning region** will come into being.

11. Several **transversal strategic objectives** may be formulated from this mission. These objectives consist in capitalising on learning, facilitating access to learning for everyone in all age ranges, assigning resources efficiently, bridging the gap between people and learning opportunities and encouraging innovation and quality in learning (contents and methods). All this needs to be done in relation to the three branches of lifelong learning that correspond to the three **vertical strategic objectives**: learning for competitiveness and innovation, learning for social inclusion and learning for an active citizenship. From these postulates, the Basque Government and the other regional institutions will prepare their **strategic lifelong learning plans** for their respective areas of geographical influence.