



THE BASQUE COUNTRY: A LEARNING REGION

WHITE PAPER ON LIFELONG LEARNING



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Presentation

The Council of Europe's Lisbon Summit held in March 2000 marked a decisive moment for the orientation of social, educational and economic policies in the European Union. Learning, life and work models were changing rapidly. This meant that, as well as adapting to change, EU citizens had to change their ways of doing things.

Together with the member states and regional and local authorities, the European Commission is working to create a European lifelong learning space designed to give EU citizens the capacity to move freely in learning milieus, different jobs, regions and countries, maximising their knowledge and skills and to fulfil their goals and the European Union's ambitions of prosperity, integration, tolerance and democratisation.

Lifelong learning should guarantee all European citizens the same opportunities to adapt to the demands imposed by social and economic transformations and thus be in a position to participate actively in the conception of Europe's future.

By means of an inter-institutional, participatory, consensus-based strategy, we have to help to:

1. build an integrationist society offering all EU citizens the same opportunities to access quality learning throughout their lives, a society where the standards and regulations governing education and training are based, in the first place and above all, on people's needs and expectations;
2. change the ways education and training is given and paid work is organised, so that people can learn throughout their lives and develop and follow their own combination of learning, work, leisure and family life;



3. achieve higher general levels of education and qualification in all sectors, guarantee that the education and training on offer is of the highest quality and at the same assure that the knowledge and skills of citizens match the shifts in work requirements, in the organisation of the work place and working methods;
4. encourage and train people to take a more active part in all spheres of modern public life and, in particular, in political and social life.

With these common objectives, this White Paper on lifelong learning aims to provide a framework for the development of a coherent strategy to make the Basque Country a learning region and help towards the larger goal of a European lifelong learning space.

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Introduction

The European Council of Lisbon in March 2000 set the strategic objective of transforming the European Union into the most competitive, dynamic knowledge-based society in the world. Ratified in March 2001 at the Council of Stockholm, the objective is the result of the undeniable evolution of European society towards an era of knowledge, with all that that implies for economic, social and cultural life.

The knowledge-based society, in parallel with other wide-ranging socio-economic tendencies such as globalisation, the impact of information technologies, changes in demographic patterns and family structures, is a source of potential benefits and challenges to society as a whole.

People have at their disposal major new opportunities for communication and circulation. To take advantage of such opportunities and participate actively in society, it is essential to permanently acquire knowledge, competence and skills that will lead to more advantageous competitive conditions for our society, as knowledge and competence make a powerful driving force for economic development.

However, lifelong learning is a concept that goes beyond purely economic considerations. It also helps societies to be more open and democratic. According to an OECD report¹, learning and investment in human capital is associated with a larger GDP and greater civic participation and higher welfare levels.

According to the Commission Communiqué² "Making the European lifelong learning space a reality", *the objectives of this European space should be to help citizens face up to the challenges of the knowledge-based society, by circulating freely in and between different learning milieus, jobs, regions and countries with a view to learning and to fulfilling the goals*

¹ Financing Education – Investments and Returns: Analysis of the World. Education Indicators 2002 - OECD

² Commission Communiqué: Making the European lifelong learning space a reality – COM(2001) 678 final, 21.11.2001



and ambitions of prosperity, integration, tolerance and democratisation held by the European Union and the EU candidate countries

The Basque Country has worked on a range of plans and initiatives that are gradually paving the way for the region to become one of Europe's most advanced societies. Initiatives such as Basque Country 2000Tres: *For real convergence, social cohesion and modernisation*, or eGIPUZKOA have given a definitive boost in the region to the development of the information society.

With regard to the knowledge-based society, the Basque Government has also worked on initiatives directly related to lifelong learning. In late 2000 it adopted a decree³ in support of lifelong-learning-related initiatives and in spring 2001 it began a consultation process involving society as a whole and the other regional institutions. The Basque Qualifications and Vocational Training Institute published a version of the Memorandum⁴ of the Commission of the European Communities on Lifelong learning.

Following the publication of the Memorandum, the Basque Government held a congress on lifelong learning at the Euskalduna Conference Centre, Bilbao, in April 2001 with the title *Basque Country, a learning region*. The congress formally opened the consultation phase through a specially-held forum in the employment and training portal *lanbide.net* and the contributions made by several Basque institutions. This consultation process led to a document entitled "The Basque Autonomous Community's contribution to the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning", approved at the regional Cabinet meeting of 5 June 2001 and sent to the European Commission⁵. The creation of the Lifelong Learning Directorate in the government formed after the elections of May 2001, and its inclusion with the Vocational Training Directorate in a Government Sub-Department testifies to the importance the regional

³ Decree 284/2000, 26 December, regulating aid for the implementation of lifelong learning initiatives (BOPV no. 249, 30 December 2000).

⁴ Memorandum on Lifelong learning – SEC(2000) 1832, 30.10.2000

⁵ Available for consultation on the European Union web page in Spanish and a summary in English http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/life/report_en.html



autonomous government gives to the subject.

As a result of this process of reflection, the present document is designed as a fundamental step forward in the preparation and subsequent development of a White Paper including a lifelong learning strategy for the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC).

The first part explains the importance of this new dimension of learning from a range of perspectives linked to the innovation- and knowledge-based economy, to educational policy, active employment policies and social inclusion and cohesion policies.

The second part deals with the treatment of lifelong learning in the European context.

The third part includes the most significant initiatives launched in the BAC from the lifelong learning perspective.

The fourth and final part suggests the main keys to the design of a new policy and a strategy designed to turn the Basque Country into a lifelong learning region.

This strategy needs to be embodied in an Action Plan in which each Basque Government Department and the provincial and local authorities, according to the powers each holds, shall define and provide a calendar for the objectives and measures to be implemented in the sphere of lifelong learning.



I. Why lifelong learning is relevant

Lifelong learning has become a key ingredient of the knowledge-based economy and the information society. From the perspectives of economic growth, competitiveness and innovation, of social inclusion and equality of opportunities, the objective of giving citizens the tools they need to meet the challenges posed by technological innovation, by the changes in production processes and the shifts in business and work methods and by the need to participate actively in society, leads us inevitably to work on a strategy favouring and promoting lifelong learning for everyone.

People need to be in a position to adapt to the far-reaching changes occurring in society and the knowledge-based economy, particularly marked by the profusion of rapidly shifting information and communication technologies. More than ever before, people need to permanently update, extend and renew their knowledge, capabilities and skills. The very process of adapting to the information society should enable them to avoid the risks of exclusion entailed by a large part of the population remaining ignorant of technological development and becoming what we might call digital illiterates. Such a development would simply accentuate the already existing differences in knowledge, differences that in the mid-term would result in major differentials in people's employability and the ability of businesses to adapt, innovate and be competitive. From this point of view, it is equally vital to respond adequately to the growing challenge of population ageing by assuring that older people have the opportunity to increase and update their skills and competence levels.

People are also the protagonists of knowledge-based societies. One essential feature is the human capacity to generate and use knowledge efficiently and intelligently in a world in constant transformation. To develop this capacity fully, citizens must want and be able to take control of their own lives and, in short, be *active* citizens. The concept of active citizenship alludes to the opportunity and the form of participating in all spheres of economic and social life, the potential and the risks involved in trying to do so and the extent to which such



participation makes people feel that they really belong to the society they live in, and that they are entitled to their say in the way that society develops.

In the light of this situation, a new approach is required to the education and training that equips people, in a coherent and integral way, to meet the new challenges of the knowledge-based economy and society. That new approach is lifelong learning. The newness of the new approach lies in designing a **global policy** to ensure everyone, of whatever age, becomes involved in learning actions, a global policy that integrates existing actions and which contributes new lines of action in which civil society can participate. This is the way to overcome the strict vocational training frame and to head towards a much broader conception of learning. This goes beyond the idea that learning is concentrated in a single phase of a person's life, as a student, to extend it throughout his or her entire life. Of course the learning process would have major differences in intensity and be designed to cover different objectives, with the means of access adapted to different needs, different teaching methodologies in accordance with the varied forms of knowledge acquisition. Such an approach also goes beyond the idea that learning is limited to formal, regulated and institutional contexts (schools, and colleges, vocational training centres and universities). The idea now is to capitalise on the learning acquired in non-formal or even informal contexts, in different walks of daily, personal, family, professional and sporting life, among others.

In short, lifelong learning aims to encompass all aspects of education and training, including the non-formal ones, throughout a person's lifetime.

The triple dimension of lifelong learning

The integral lifelong learning policy has a threefold dimension: innovation, social inclusion and active citizenship.

Lifelong learning and innovation



Knowledge has become the strategic resource *par excellence* for organisations and territories. Organisations find themselves caught up in an endless race to improve management, introduce total quality parameters, innovate permanently and adapt to new associative, competitive and regulatory milieus. As a result, organisations set themselves the objectives of improving competitiveness, increasing innovation, refining products and services and their presentation, broadening their offer, taking the ecological, environmental and safety factors on board and, essentially, adapting to the needs of their clients.

Technological, economic and business transformations occur in the information society and the knowledge-based economy at a frightening, and ever-increasing velocity. These transformations are so radical that it is vital to provide people, as economic agents, with the basic skills they need to be able to update, assimilate, transfer and share the kinds of knowledge that increase their ability to adapt to constantly changing situations. Which explains the twofold objective of providing the active population with the tools it needs to meet the challenges of technological innovation and using learning to attract people in an inactive labour situation towards economic activity. Theories of quality and active employment policies inevitably take such transformations on board. Organisations and people find themselves needing to work and learn in networks.

Lifelong learning and social inclusion

Lifelong learning is also an essential instrument for positive action on social inclusion. It gives people greater levels of autonomy, helping them to take decisions and shoulder responsibilities in the design of their own life projects and in their personal and professional development. The lifelong learning strategy can and should focus particularly on the underprivileged – whether for reasons of sex, age, social or ethnic origin — who normally have lower levels of training and education, by giving them the updated basic skills required to



increase their employability and facilitate their social inclusion.

Lifelong learning and active citizenship

Lifelong learning also favours the drive towards active citizenship, through the increase of knowledge. Knowledge strengthens the critical spirit and helps towards a greater understanding of society, of people's and citizens' rights and duties and of the way the local, regional, national and European institutional, political and economic systems operate. This means people have a greater chance of influencing more efficiently the decisions affecting them, thereby promoting their participation in social and cultural groups, political parties, trade unions, non-profit making organisations, NGOs and the mass media, among other things. Active citizenship entails new forms of governance that promote the participation of citizens and public and private associations in policy design and application.

New challenges

The threefold dimension of lifelong learning poses new challenges for educational and social policies from perspectives ranging from the financial to the organisational.

The person at the centre of the learning system

The economic basis of the knowledge-based society is the creation and exchange of intangible goods and services. This implies the need for people to be capable of generating, using and sharing knowledge efficiently against a background of continual transformation. So people need to plan coherent learning activities during their lives, which means that proper guidance and adequate training, adapted to their needs and personally and professionally satisfactory, should be available to hand.

The person is thus placed at the centre of the learning system. Responsibility is given to



people, who are also given aid and assessment in their bid to permanently identify their specific learning needs and to get involved in the design of an individualised educational itinerary. A lifelong learning strategy should provide **support to people**: information on opportunities and conditions — costs, calendars, places, timetables, required prior knowledge, materials, methodologies — of learning from local to European level. It should also provide assessment or quality mediation and facilitate the design of individualised learning itineraries and stimulate absolutely everyone to acquire the basic skills and competence levels required by the knowledge-based society.

In phases subsequent to compulsory education, the central position of the person implies that the training offer should be suited to his or her needs and not the other way round. Learning becomes an exercise of personal freedom, personal responsibility and the assumption of a personal role, an exercise in which individuals advance along their learning course depending on what they need and want, not according to what is on offer in the training and educational market.

Paradigm shift

All these shifts and transformations, taken together with the threefold dimension of lifelong learning, imply a cultural change, a **change of mindset**. Some highly significant changes are ushered in with the idea of lifelong learning:

1. it changes the way we understand our own life cycles, around which social and economic organisation revolves, as the until now rigid frontiers between different phases of life disappear; i.e., schooling in infancy and adolescence, (prolonged, where appropriate, by the option to enter tertiary education), work during adult lifetime and leisure during retirement and old age,
2. it shifts the shouldering of responsibility for designing individual learning itineraries as opposed to the obligatory curricula of regulated education,
3. it changes the way we actually understand what it means to ‘study’ as opposed to



learning as something playful and participatory

4. it even changes the way leisure and work time is organised.

Thus a new learning culture is brought into being that potentially involves the whole of society. Organisations, associations, businesses, centres that until now had not considered themselves as educational begin to see themselves as learning supplier, facilitator or mediator organisations or at least acquire the potential to do so. Together with traditional teaching centres such as schools, secondary schools, vocational training centres, universities, academies, own or foreign language schools and music conservatories, in accordance with the new paradigm, businesses and businessmen's associations, Chambers of Commerce, trade unions, professional colleges and institutes, nurseries and retired people's centres, technology and research centres, foundations and associations, libraries, play centres, and cultural centres, bookshops and cybercafes, conference centres, museums and galleries, auditoriums, theatres and cinemas, theme parks, tourist attractions, the media, Internet portals and service providers, even health centres and transport can also potentially be considered learning organisations.

Financing lifelong learning

The new challenges posed by lifelong learning in its fullest sense require a new approach to financing formulas and the need to assure transparency in financing via public resources and in the way they are distributed — e.g., taxes, European structural funds or community programmes and insurance contributions. In this context all interested public, semi-public and private parties need to shoulder their responsibility in financing learning.

There are many ways to finance lifelong learning, from total subsidisation through public funds to exclusively private financing. The most usual formula to date has been public support to the learning offer through aid schemes and subsidies to training service providers. Nevertheless, the use of complementary or alternative financial instruments becomes necessary



to ensure the funds available are allocated efficiently and a greater level of involvement of ordinary people. This is the case of formulas that give a greater leading role to demand, such as individual learning accounts, learning cheques, credits and other similar tax formulas, deductions or bonuses, where the subsidy normally originates in public funds with the participation of the person, financial houses and businesses in question.

Learning territories

Territories that promote learning for all become learning territories, They may be learning towns, cities, regions or countries. In such territories, the public authorities will promote strategies to mobilise the public and private sectors around lifelong learning by offering people lifelong learning opportunities. In these territories, lifelong learning should be dealt with in all relevant policies, the set of cross-policy actions making it transversal in nature. This is not mere rhetoric: the knowledge-based society necessarily requires a lifelong learning strategy.



II. Lifelong learning in Europe

The Lisbon Summit

Lifelong learning is rapidly turning into one of the most important tools available to the European Union in its bid to fulfil the new strategic objective set by the **European Council of Lisbon** in March 2000. This objective was, during the present decade, for the European Union to become the most competitive, dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater levels of social cohesion. To comply with this new strategic objective, the Council of Lisbon explicitly acknowledged that investment in human resources was essential and that efficient, modern education and training systems needed to be backed and complemented by the common, transversal line of action known as lifelong learning. A new work method, the open coordination method, was established, signalling the need for the EU, its member states and, by extension, the regions to coordinate and intensify the attention given to, among other things, the development of human resources, a key factor in any knowledge-based economy.

Subsequently, the **European Council of Feira** in June 2000 invited member states, the Council and the European Commission, within their respective powers, to define coherent strategies and practical measures designed to promote permanent education for all.

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning

Despite **1996** having already been declared **European Lifelong Learning Year**, community actions on lifelong learning did not really take off until the publication of the “**Memorandum on Lifelong Learning**”⁶ published by the European Commission in November 2000 to begin profiling responses to the challenges set in Lisbon. The Memorandum opened a Europe-wide debate on six key messages: the new basic qualifications for all, the increase in



investment in human resources, innovation in teaching and learning, capitalising on learning, the new approach to guidance and assessment and the bid to bring learning closer to home.

The Commission Communiqué: towards a European lifelong learning area

On the basis of the contributions to the Memorandum made by interested parties, with a view to using it as an instrument for compliance with the Council of Feira mandate to prepare coherent lifelong learning strategies, in November 2001 the European Commission presented its communiqué entitled *Making the European lifelong learning space a reality*⁷. The Commission intended the Communiqué to contribute to the creation of a European Lifelong Learning Area and to identify the basic components of coherent, global lifelong learning strategies. Referring to this new European Space, the Commission included in the communiqué an action plan to facilitate citizen mobility and the acknowledgement of skills, competence levels and qualifications. The communiqué also defined lifelong learning strategies as strategic frames for coordinating and complementing all learning-related measures, independently of the sphere they occur in.

In the document the Commission acknowledged the need for member states to develop and apply coherent, global strategies, which in turn required concerted action begun on a European scale, in accordance with agreed priorities. It also mentioned the need to develop local lifelong learning associations or partenariats.

Lifelong learning in educational policy

A further result of the Lisbon Summit was the European Union's decision to work on opening up the European level coordination process in education and training, in which lifelong learning has priority status. Once again, with a view to complying with the new strategic objective, the European Council of Lisbon asked the Education Council to think in general

⁶ *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*. SEC (2000) 1832, 30.10.2000.

⁷ *Making the European lifelong learning space a reality*. COM (2001) 678 final, 21.11.2001.



terms about the future specific objectives of European educational and training systems, so as to adjust them to the challenges of the knowledge-based economy and society.

The **report on the future objectives of the educational and training systems**⁸ was presented at the European Summit at Stockholm in March 2001. In the report, the Council set three strategic objectives for the European Union during the current decade- Lifelong learning took a prominent position here. The three strategic objectives consisted in improving the quality and efficiency of education and training systems in the EU, facilitating the access of all to the education and training systems and opening up education and training systems to the world. The three strategic objectives in turn were broken down into thirteen specific objectives around which the coordination of different systems at European level would be organised. Despite these objectives being set for 2010, they were to be subjected to an intermediate review in 2004.

On 14 February 2002, the Council and the Commission adopted a **detailed work programme**⁹ for the future specific objectives, which was presented at the spring European summit in Barcelona in March 2002. This programme became the European agenda for priority educational and training issues on which the coordination and development work from there to 2010 would be based.

On 13 February 2002 the Commission also adopted a **competence and mobility action plan**¹⁰ with the objective of eliminating, by 2005, the barriers to EU workers' professional and geographical mobility. The action plan included a package of 25 measures, many closely linked to Lifelong Learning.

The open coordination method in educational policy

To launch this detailed work programme, **the open coordination method** was to be applied. Conceived at the Lisbon Summit as a means of extending best practices at European

⁸ Education Council decision, 14 February 2001 based on a proposal from the Commission COM(2001) 59 final.

⁹ Education Council decision, 14 February 2002 based on a proposal from the Commission COM (2001) 501 final.

¹⁰ COM (2002) 72, 08.02.2002.



level, the method was also expected to achieve greater convergence regarding the EU's main objectives. The open coordination method covers a range of formulas for coordinating and orienting member states towards common European objectives and uses, in principle, instruments such as strategies, guidelines, objectives and calendars, recommendations, benchmarking and the establishment of indicators as methods for comparing best practices, controls between homologues and evaluation.

In education and training, the open coordination method would be applied differently, and under a different time frame, for each specific objective, although by 2004 all coordination work for all objectives is expected to be under way. In spheres such as learning and education, powers do not reside at community level and the European Union can only assure mobility and the acknowledgement of qualifications. Which is why the open method is such a valuable instrument for facilitating European coordination in spheres over which the member states, rather than the Community, have powers.

Of course, allusions to member states made at European level should be made extensive to regions and particularly to regions with powers in the issues in question, since European-level agreements between European institutions and member states should be reflected at all territorial levels to achieve genuine community-wide action effectively covering the entire European Union.

The transversality of lifelong learning

But the European Union is also promoting the **transversal nature** of lifelong learning in other interesting spheres of action. This is the case, for example, of the European employment strategy which includes a horizontal directive concerning lifelong learning that has to be included in National Employment Action Plans presented by member states. Likewise, the communiqué *Making the European lifelong learning space a reality* points to the need to create synergies between processes, strategies and community plans such as, the specific Future



Objectives of the Education and Training systems¹¹, the European Employment Strategy, the European Social Agenda, the Competence and Mobility Plan, the *eLearning* initiative and the White Paper on Youth. This way, the European Lifelong Learning Area should coincide with the European Research and Innovation Area to create what was described at the Barcelona summit as the European Knowledge Area.

The Council of Feira's recommendation concerning the definition of coherent strategies and practical measures for the promotion of lifelong education for all has been embodied in the Communiqué in the boost given to **strategic frames** of action by all the member states and in the identification of the essential components of these frames for constructing the European Lifelong Learning Area.

The Barcelona Summit on 15 and 16 March 2002 ratified the progress made to date in this sphere and approved the work planned for the future. It also stressed the need to strengthen the lifelong learning function when the European Employment Strategy came to be reviewed and to increase the opportunities for older people to remain in the labour market through effective access to lifelong learning.

The role of social interlocutors

From the European Council of Lisbon the development of the education and vocational training systems within the lifelong learning frame has been increasingly acknowledged as a crucial factor for the future of Europe in the era of knowledge. Today it is something of a truism that the European Union will only become the world's main knowledge-based economy if it has the crucial contribution of education and vocational training, as factors for economic growth, innovation, sustainable employment and social cohesion.

Particularly important was the agreement reached on 14 March 2002 between business associations and trade unions of the European Union (UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and CES-

¹¹ Conclusions of the Council, 14 February 2002, (DOCE 2002/C 58/1)



ETUC) which provides for an action frame for the development of lifelong competences and qualifications. The frame stresses the shared responsibility of businesses and workers on this lifelong learning dimension and specifies four priority areas of action, the identification of competence and qualification needs, their acknowledgement and validation, information, support and guidance on lifelong learning and the allocation of the resources required. It is the task of the social interlocutors (businessmen's associations and trade unions) to promote this frame in the member states at all levels.

Aspects relating to the lifelong competence and qualification development entail devoting part of work time to assure learning goes on. The *Making the European lifelong learning space a reality* Communiqué proposed that all businesses should assign at least 35 employee work hours a year to learning.

The regional European dimension

Although at regional or local level the term 'learning city' or region or country has come into use, once again in many cases we are not dealing with territories with genuine learning strategies but with isolated or specific actions in this area. Some European projects¹² do concentrate on analysing the requirements of elements towards the definition of a local or regional lifelong learning strategy. Such analysis has generally registered how much there is still to be done before we can talk of learning towns, cities or regions.

In general, it is clear that, basically, the notion of lifelong learning is more developed in regions in the north of Europe and that this is therefore where most learning initiatives and strategies are in practice concentrated. Indeed, while in the north the term lifelong learning is used normally, in the south people still talk of education and training.

¹² E.g. the *TELS – Towards the European learning society* (<http://www.learningcities.net>) and *PoLLlis – Lifelong learning in European cities and new work opportunities for the underprivileged* (<http://www.imfegranada.es/proyectos/prog-europa/leonardo/PoLLlis>) projects.



In this context, introducing a lifelong learning strategy is in itself something of a challenge for regions, cities and states looking to become learning territories with a view to responding adequately to the challenges posed by Lifelong learning in the knowledge-based economy and society, and thus to achieve the strategic objective of the European Union during the present decade. This is precisely one of the reasons why the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL, of which the Basque Country is a founder member) was created in October 2001¹³.

¹³ EARLALL's mission is to promote cooperation between its members in the frame of lifelong learning-related policies and to establish a close relationship of cooperation with the institutions of the European Union and public institutions and international organisations involved in lifelong learning, with a view to contributing in the local and regional dimension to learning-related policies. Besides the Basque Country, the founder members of EARLALL are Tuscany (Italy), Wales (UK), Västergötland (Sweden), Vejle Amt (Denmark), Renania Palatinate (Germany), Madona Regiona (Latvia), the Balearic Islands, Sogn Og Fjordane (Norway). The Association is open to new members and many expressions of interest in joining have been received to date.



III. Lifelong learning in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country

As in other European regions, several regional government departments in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country have promoted a range of measures and actions that now come under the new lifelong learning paradigm both in regulated education and vocational training¹⁴ and non-formal and non-regulated spheres¹⁵, which address different groups and are often participated in by different social agents.

From the institutional point of view, the objective is to assure that all Basque citizens have a **genuine right** to acquire and update qualifications through lifelong learning, as the Basque President acknowledged for the first time in the general policy debate in the Basque Parliament on 22 September 2000¹⁶. To make this right effective, the Basque Government and the other BAC institutions have a series of measures, including the Basque Vocational Training Plan. Decree 222/2001, of 16 October, established the structure of the Department of Education, Universities & Research for the current legislature, and created a new Sub-Department of Vocational Training & Lifelong Learning, with a Lifelong Learning Directorate responsible for:

- designing, defining and applying the lifelong learning actions required to implement a model that introduces us into the new knowledge-based society and enables us to take advantage of the opportunities it offers.
- defining the vocational training and lifelong learning policies that involve the acquisition or increase in lifelong qualifications.

Major initiatives have been launched in a number of areas that may also be included in the

¹⁴ Regulated initiatives are compiled in the portal *hezkuntza* (www.hezkuntza.ej-gv.net)

¹⁵ The interactive portal for employment and training *lanbide.net* (www.lanbide.net) has a permanently updated online database on a large part of the non-formal training and learning offer. In 2003, the lifelong learning portal www.hiru.com was launched, with online teach-yourself contents in a range of areas of knowledge.



new lifelong learning paradigm, including Science & Technology, Vocational Training, the ICT, guidance and basic training.

The Basque Vocational Training Plan

Integration is one of the essential ideas of the Basque Vocational Training Plan (BVTP), in which many socio-economic agents are involved. In other words, all vocational training should be associated with the Professional Qualifications System, principally designed to identify the features, extension and levels of professional competence required in labour areas in different production sectors. The idea is then to define professional qualifications that respond to needs arising from technological and organisational transformations and which are detected basically by the Basque Vocational Training System Observatory. Altogether, professional qualifications are presented in competence areas and on five levels to facilitate guidance for individuals and organisations on guidance- or assessment-related objectives.

Once the qualifications including the competence levels required by the production system and the labour market have been established, work begins on establishing how to bring them into being. Training becomes remarkably important as a means of acquiring competence and skills, because a single benchmark enables the integration of the different subsystems of vocational training. Qualifications can be accessed from regulated training, from continuous training or from job training. To facilitate the work involved in establishing training, the Basque Vocational Training & Qualifications Institute establishes a **Modular Catalogue** of training associated with the Qualifications System. The catalogue's competence units include specific professional modules and other transversal modules defined by the Basque Professional Qualifications Institute for each professional qualification. The modular catalogue contains basic modules that mostly cover the basic skills required in the knowledge-based society and economy, including communication, ICT, numeric and spatial expression and a technological and scientific sphere.

¹⁶ Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU acknowledges the right of everyone to education and access to lifelong and vocational training.



The BVTP envisages the recognition of competence achieved via non-formal and informal learning, in particular work experience. To this end it created the Basque Agency for Competence and Vocational Training Quality Evaluation, whose main mission is to implement a device tackling the tasks of acknowledging and evaluating the possible competence levels of an individual as a result of his or her non-formal or informal learning. The application of the BVTP includes the introduction of a system that enables people to accredit their levels of competence acquired in non-formal contexts, particularly through work experience. It also enables people, if they want, to complete the modules corresponding to the competence levels they need to access qualifications in accordance with the modular catalogue. The achievements and certifications each individual achieves will be registered in a personal competence card, giving him or her the chance to certify the competence levels acquired in non-formal contexts: training in businesses and work experience, among others.

Finally, the Quality & Vocational Training Evaluation Agency evaluates the entire system. One undeniable advantage of the Basque system lies in the existence of a powerful network of integral vocational training centres that attend to initial vocational training students, the unemployed and people in jobs. These integral centres have a special potential for acting as catalysts for innovation-linked lifelong learning.

The Basque Foundation for Continuous Training, **Hobetuz**, directed by a tripartite Board of Trustees involving trade unions, business confederations and the Basque authorities, promotes, through financing, the training actions designed to update or specialise the knowledge of the human resources in businesses, not forgetting individual training for self-employed workers. The continuous training subsystem principally provides training for employees in medium or large enterprises, including cooperative workers.

The Inter-institutional Plan for Employment in the BAC 2000-2003 specifies that job training for unemployed people should be performed in accordance with the Professional Qualifications System of the Basque Vocational Training Plan.



Major innovative initiatives in line with the concept of lifelong learning include:

1. *Txekinbide*: joint initiative of the Guipúzcoa Provincial Council and the Basque Government which involves a “cheque” awarded by professional guidance centres to unemployed people and which enables them to develop personal insertion itineraries integrating guidance, information and vocational training (initially in ICT) and in-house training in businesses.
2. *Egokituz*: joint initiative of the Vizcaya Provincial Council and the Basque Government with the partenariat of the *Fundación Gaztelanbidean*, a foundation of local savings bank BBK. This involves a series of re-professionalisation programmes designed for unemployed university graduates, vocational training diploma holders or people who have successfully terminated their secondary education, to provide training in qualifications with greater possibilities of providing them with a job.

ICT-related initiatives

In the frame of the "Basque Country 2000-Tres" initiative the Basque Government launched the "Basque Country in the Information Society Plan", designed to favour the diffusion and use of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the BAC.

Among other things, this new general initiative involved the **Konekt@ Zaitez** programme designed to facilitate access to Internet for everyone living in the BAC. The **Premia (2000-2003)** programme aims to guarantee minimum infrastructure and equipment, Internet and Intranet connections and teacher training in ICT at all centres in the public network. The idea is to provide incentives for educational centres to promote the use of ICT and to orient such centres towards a set of services and new work models deriving from the information society.

In particular, as far as the Konek@Zaitez programme is concerned, to ensure that everyone living in the BAC acquires the basic ICT skills, the Basque authorities have become fully involved in organising Internet courses for the entire population. Among other measures, the programme includes the award of aid for buying computers and the creation of local centres for



Internet use, tutoring and learning (**Kzgunea**), places that have the potential for taking part in the local eLearning centre network.

In the Premia programme, the Department of Education, Universities & Research aims, at all non-university educational centres in the public network, to install or extend the local network, the supply of computers, the adaptation to the network of the existing computer equipment, broad band connection to Internet and the laying on of basic services (email, web space, etc.), plus actions induced by this investment process such as training users, the maintenance of infrastructures and equipment, the cost of communications y and the creation of contents (web page of the centre, educational web page).

In Guipúzcoa the **Emaweb** programme directed by the Guipúzcoa Provincial Council with the cooperation of the Basque Government was highly successful. The programme provided Internet courses for unemployed women. The Álava Provincial Council also organised Internet courses for retired people.

The Guipúzcoa Provincial Council and the Basque Government (Departments of Education and Labour) set up jointly a Learning Accounts project, in the frame of the **European Learning Account Project**. This project is based on the *ikastxekin* chequebooks for ICT, for teachers at post-obligatory secondary education centres in Guipúzcoa. All teachers taking part are given a chequebook that gives them access to an approved centre of their choice for training in ICT. Fifty per cent of the teachers have joined the initiative, contributing 25% of the total cost of the training, the remaining cost being financed by the institutions involved.

The Guipúzcoa Provincial Council and the Basque Government have also developed the educational intranet HEZITEK connecting training centres, and which gives teachers access to support materials and e-learning.

Tutoring and guidance

Although tutoring, guidance, consultancy services and mediation for learning are all hugely



important, it is not always easy to find professionals who can provide these services efficiently. Such services are however general in primary education, obligatory secondary education and vocational training, and need to be extended to the universities in the mid-term.

For people who have already finished their formal education, the coverage provided by professionals and places providing such services needs to be improved, and preferably provided free of charge. Providing such a service is the responsibility of the administration. As regards guidance for insertion in the labour market or psycho-social help to favour social inclusion or insertion, professionals and public services are available (employment services and social assistance). It would be a good idea to make further progress on guidance and mediation to bring them ever further into line with individual learning strategies.

A number of guidance services have been launched by the Basque institutions in the BAC, such as the Basque Employment Guidance, which has a network of collaborating centres, and the *Behargintza* network of local employment centres in Vizcaya.

Basque Government Decree 298/2002¹⁷ opted to facilitate the work done by professionals known generically as learning mediators. These are professionals with knowledge at local level who will work in close cooperation with learning facilitators and promoters, paying special attention to the more underprivileged groups with lower educational levels. They will need to compile information about the entire formal, non-formal and informal learning offer available in the area, with a view to matching the training offer and personal learning needs. Whenever deficiencies in the training offer are detected, they may mediate with suppliers so that these adjust their offers to the needs detected. Mediators will be proactive in their approach to generating demand by encouraging people and social interlocutors to present learning initiatives.

Support is also being provided for local learning projects for adults over the age of 25, whether they are employed, unemployed or inactive in non-formal contexts.



Adult Education

In the BAC, the EPA (Adult Education Centres) do important work in general and on basic training. The EPA meet the cultural and social training needs and interests of adults, developing their self-teaching capability and their ability to take part in social, cultural and working life. These people may progress from functional literacy to Secondary Education, thereby promoting the threefold dimension that covers the skills and competence levels required for social inclusion, active citizenship and for facilitating lifelong learning and innovation.

The EPA provide access for all adults to permanent ongoing education, often with specific actions addressed to the underprivileged, to people who have never taken part in education or training and immigrants, as a means of facilitating their social integration.

Other noteworthy experiences include the Basque language, literacy and culture courses for adults, which have been running for nearly 20 years and which are provided by networked centres such as HABE or AEK. The recent university for people of 55 and over, which now operates in the campuses of all three Basque provinces, and offers courses adapted for older people in local history, health and the environment, was promoted by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) in cooperation with other institutions.

The Basque Science, Technology & Innovation Plan

Finally, the Basque Science, Technology & Innovation Plan 2001-2004 contains a Social Cohesion and Action Plan that identifies as a general research area the closing of the digital gap in a lifelong learning frame. The new context in which the Plan was developed was conditioned by a number of issues, including:

¹⁷ Decree 284/2002, 17 December 2002, (BOPV no. 248, 30 December), which regulates aid for lifelong learning – related measures and initiatives.



- The spread of a new way of understanding and seeing the world (the global village) supported in a new environment (the knowledge-based society) which provides the basis of the new society,
- The generation of knowledge and, more importantly, its effective exploitation is gradually becoming the only source of competitiveness sustainable at all levels.

The Plan is divided into three major areas, one of which is Basic Non-oriented Research. This action area specifically addresses the development, by the scientific community in the region, of essential knowledge and one of its objectives is to raise the level of knowledge as a good thing in itself. The need to stimulate joint initiatives between technology and research centres, the university, vocational training centres and businesses is clear from the innovation and lifelong learning perspective.

This brief overview of some of the main experiences in the autonomous community shows how in practice, intuitively, particularly in the Basque Vocational Training Plan, concepts close to the new lifelong learning paradigm have been used implicitly. Nevertheless, the need to adopt integral approaches shared by all Basque institutions and in which society in general participates requires the design of a strategy resulting in specific action plans.



IV. The strategy for converting the Basque Country into a learning region

The new approach this White Paper argues for implies thought and reflection, plus the design and implementation of a global or integral policy addressing the threefold dimension of lifelong learning (innovation, social inclusion and active citizenship). The approach also has to mobilise the available resources and promote partnerships between all interested agents in the BAC. People of all ages, active or inactive, should have the opportunity to design their own lifelong learning itineraries and to undertake learning experiences in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, in line with their itineraries. The agents, organisations and institutions of the BAC must stimulate, organise and manage these itineraries and actions suitably.

Lifelong learning is, then, a new frame encompassing all the lines of the educational system¹⁸, of the integral vocational training system¹⁹ and the multiple expressions of non-formal and informal learning, while at the same time endowing them with organisational, strategic and functional coherence. This new frame should provide solutions to the challenges posed by Lifelong learning, including the acquisition of basic universal competences, the certification of professional competence levels, the analysis of learning needs, itinerary design, materials, methodologies (particularly those that include eLearning) and itineraries, access to learning, financing the costs of learning and improvements in investments in human resources, the incorporation of new technologies, guidance, mediation and educational and professional tutoring, geographical mobility (including language learning) and the development of a range of learning centres.

With regard to the BAC, the strategy should be conceived for the entire regional society by **all Basque institutions, with the participation of society as a whole, through its structures and** from all levels. This is so not only because powers over issues linked to Lifelong learning

¹⁸ Obligatory and post-obligatory secondary education, university, adult education.

¹⁹ Initial or regulated, continuous or job training (partial offer of integral centres).



such as education and training, culture, innovation, information society, social inclusion or employment are shared out amongst and receive major resources from these institutions. It is also because the strategy gives special attention to the geographical area, as a factor for binding possible synergies in lifelong learning between society as a whole, organisations and institutions.

The Lifelong learning strategy implies

1. Adopting a shared vision and mission: the Basque Country, learning region (a lifelong learning culture);
2. Defining strategic objectives that address the threefold dimension of lifelong learning: innovation, social inclusion and active citizenship;
3. Specifying specific goals relating to these three strategic objectives;
4. Setting indicators that enable specific objectives to be measured or gauged;
5. Finding out the real situation, measuring the degree of local awareness of this objective, analysing and evaluating the real learning opportunities and the instruments available, and identifying the economic, social, financial, cultural and organisational obstacles;
6. Designing an action plan to achieve the strategic objectives: encourage and promote facilitators, eliminate obstacles and increase the demand for lifelong learning. A plan that includes the institutions and entities involved, the actions to be launched, the methodology to be used, the calendar and the budget needed.
7. Evaluating the results of the different actions included in the plan;
8. Redefining and improving, where necessary, objectives and actions.

A shared vision: Basque Country, learning region

The idea is to create a learning culture. It is particularly important to make people, organisations and institutions aware of the need for and the advantages of lifelong learning and of publicising the profound implications and potential of the new conception with regard to all expressions of teaching, training, knowledge, culture and research. All institutions, organisations, businesses and people in the Basque Country that share the lifelong learning



vision will redefine their own mission and actions to frame them within the new conception. It is especially important for everyone to accept and take on board the concept of lifelong learning and apply it in their personal and working life. In particular, it is vital for people working in education or learning or cultural activities to adopt the lifelong learning vision and have a coherent discourse that acts as an example and a model in the area where they live and work. This will ensure that the Basque Country, as a learning region, makes progress and headway in the Knowledge Society.

To guarantee determined progress in this direction, this new culture must be shared and promoted by people with political and institutional responsibility, and by people with responsibilities in social milieus, including trade union leaders, leading businessmen, the media and particularly educators.

Strategic objectives

The crucial phase consists in defining strategic objectives that enable us to achieve the vision of the Basque Country as a learning region and which address the threefold dimension of lifelong learning: innovation, social inclusion and active citizenship.

The mission the Basque institutions must assign themselves with regard to the vision of the Basque Country as a learning region consists in **assuring that all residents of the Basque Country have a real opportunity to learn, in a different, more flexible way adapted to their needs**. The idea is to attract more people to learning, by making it increasingly attractive, better acknowledged and more valued socially. Obstacles to physical and financial access also need to be overcome, and information must be made available on real learning possibilities in the territory and the orientation required to identify and address individual learning needs by adapting, in the best possible way, the training offer.

This mission involves a series of **transversal strategic objectives** consisting in capitalising on learning, facilitating the access of people of all ages to learning, assigning



resources efficiently, bringing learning opportunities closer to people, promoting innovation and quality in learning (contents and methods), all in relation to the three lines 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.

Specific objectives and indicators

Each vertical strategic objective involves a series of more specific objectives.

Specific objectives related to **innovation and competitiveness** include:

1. Set excellence and total quality as goals at all educational levels, whether university or non-university
2. Certify knowledge and skills acquired by different channels in line with community directives
3. Cooperate on the transparency of qualifications and competence certification and incorporate them into the European Curriculum Vitae model,
4. Assure the practical side of scientific and technical studies via practice, projects and training periods in businesses and bodies,
5. Promote, from secondary education, learning oriented towards maths, sciences and technical subjects
6. Bring young people, and particularly young women, into contact the scientific milieu using innovative methodologies that make learning them an attractive prospect, tutoring and designing attractive, flexible itineraries,
7. Promote access to scientific and technical disciplines at university from other disciplines (attractive itineraries),
8. Promote scientific subjects at learning centres, particularly through the use of ITC,
9. Encourage businesses to become learning organisations,
10. Assure and promote continuous training for workers in technological developments and cutting edge technologies and ensure they recycle so as to cover the need for qualified workers on the labour market,



11. Support research at all kinds of learning centres and partenariats that promote research projects,
12. Promote the systematic use of ICT and eLearning, develop materials and methods that can be used for all ages,
13. Promote the possibility of training and teaching in the major EU languages,
14. Adapt the offer in terms of timetables, calendars, training modules that are flexible and that can be combined to maximise access to learning at research and educational centres,

Specific objectives linked to **social inclusion** include:

15. Define the basic competence levels people need to have for their personal and professional development in the knowledge-based society,
16. Ensure that the entire population, and particularly the underprivileged sectors, have the chance to acquire and develop these basic competence levels and skills,
17. Ensure that everyone and particularly the underprivileged, have access to information, mediation, guidance and tutoring,
18. Facilitate the access of the immigrant population to basic training, particularly as regards social and linguistic spheres, that help them to integrate,
19. Give priority to access to information, by giving everyone, and in particular the underprivileged, the basic ICT skills,
20. Reduce the number of people who leave the educational system without basic qualifications and look for suitable ways to assuring that such people acquire basic competence,
21. Certify the basic competence- and professional skill-related knowledge and skills acquired, including those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts,
22. Encourage social agents and interlocutors to become involved in promoting learning and in the effective acknowledgement by the labour market of competences acquired in particular by people with lower qualifications,
23. Promote online training, with quality guarantees, flexibility and the access of handicapped people or people from zones with little chance of access to learning,



24. Facilitate the necessary public and private resources and investments, including the possibility of tax measures to provide incentives for investment in such resources,

Specific objectives related with **active citizenship** include²⁰ :

25. Encourage people to participate throughout their lives in organisations of social, socio-economic and political interest, (NGOs, volunteer work, political parties, trade unions and business associations, etc.) and in cultural foundations and associations,
26. Inform everyone about their social, economic and political institutions and facilitate knowledge of their rights and duties, as active members of society
27. Facilitate knowledge of our milieu, language and culture, particularly in immigrants,
28. Promote learning actions that facilitate a dynamic, active transition from one stage of life to another,
29. Facilitate the certification of competence levels acquired in informal contexts (volunteer work, associations, clubs and foundations).

The development of implementation, results and impact **indicators** will follow each specific objective and will be carried out in accordance with the proposals for indicators made by the European Commission. Their function is to enable progress and the achievement of the objectives to be measured and evaluated. In general indicators should measure the number of people interested in beginning lifelong learning actions, the number of people who actually do it, according to sector, sex, age, type of job, the resources allocated to that end, etc.

Situation status: resources map, obstacles, challenges, weaknesses

It is vital to know as accurately as possible the **statistical reality** of lifelong learning. We need to know what learning organisations exist, who the facilitators are, who in fact undertakes

²⁰ This is an area where our experience is very limited. However many informal learning-related actions have a special significance for the active citizenship. For example, volunteer work or participation in neighbourhood or retired people's or parents' associations, human rights and peace organisations, consumer associations or cultural, sporting or gastronomic foundations and associations.



learning actions and in what areas, how much time and money people give over to learning, what kind of people want to carry on learning, what kind of learning activities they want to get involved in, where the obstacles are (time, family obligations, geographical accessibility, costs, lack of accreditation, lack of information, unsatisfied need for guidance and others).

Exact information is also required on what each institution and department is actually doing. As far as possible, information is required concerning what is being done at local level in non-formal contexts. This is much more difficult as it implies fieldwork at a very detailed local scale, with information being collected on the ground (Decree 298/2002 refers to the figure of the learning mediators for this purpose). The resulting resources map will have to be updated permanently and be available as a database that all interested parties can consult.

Action Plan 2004-2006

All institutions working in the lifelong learning area with powers to implement actions in this field, will have to prepare a strategic plan indicating the programmes, objectives and measures to be adopted, in the territory for which they are empowered, and the calendar planned for the application of each measure, with the three-year period 2004-2006 as time frame.

The strategic plan designed by each learning institution or organisation in line with the objectives included in this White Paper must give order objectives by priority and propose specific action measures designed to strengthen opportunities and remove obstacles. These plans shall be designed in the light of political priorities, the powers and budgets available, inter-institutional action, initiatives by civil society and the existence of public-private partnerships.



Evaluating action

These strategic plans will be evaluated annually with any necessary proposals for improvements being made to ensure the goals proposed are achieved. In general the open coordination method will be used: definition of specifically developed objectives and indicators that enable results to be measured and compared. The best results and the actions that have brought them about are detected, highlighting them as examples of best practices that can be emulated by other institutions. Also identified are the actions that are not in compliance with the objectives and the obstacles detected. Finally, all the institutions taking part are involved in the mutual evaluation of results and redefine the objectives in line with the experience acquired. A final global evaluation of all the strategic plans will also be made.

Redefining strategies

The redefinition of strategies is ideally the consequence of a process of definition of objectives achievable via lines of action proposed from a known situation. The experience acquired provides the data necessary for such redefinition.