

Summary of European Grundtvig Project first meeting in London September 2001

Countries present

England  
Germany  
Austria  
Poland  
Denmark  
Hungary

Outline of Programme

See attached documentation

Summary of outcomes from comments made by the delegates

- Delegates valued the **sharing** by each participant of how education **was structured** and delivered in their country by both the **State and the Catholic Church**.
- All agreed that **Lifelong Learning** was the **responsibility** of the **individual**, the **State**, trade unions and **faith communities**.
- All felt they now had a better understanding of the **education systems** operating in the member countries and how the schooling systems had a significant **impact in determining citizens attitude's to Lifelong Learning**.
- The **factors** that were **significant** in the schooling systems in **determining attitudes to Lifelong Learning** were: any form of **selection** particularly at an early age seem to demotivate learners; **the statutory number or years** in the education system and the age that students begin formal learning, as well as **the examination and accreditation system**; the State's attitude to spiritual and religious education, and to education for citizenship.
- Delegates discussed in some detail the **lack of examinations until 18** in Denmark, **the selection systems** in Germany, Austria, Hungary and parts of England and the **different ages for starting school** in each country and the different age group structures within the education systems in each participating country.
- All agreed that if the **European Union** wished to promote and support Lifelong Learning it **would need to address the philosophical basis** that determines each countries structures as well as the existing funding, examination, political and management structures. All agreed that within each of their structures there were elements which produced a mindset which may not value Lifelong Learning.

- The European Memorandum's strong focus on adult learning was valued but evaluation must take place as to how learning prior to "16" determines adults' attitudes to Lifelong Learning.
- All participants agreed that politicians tended to be "system thinkers". Their mindset was 'if you have a problem execute a new structure or system to address it such as the LSC in England. All agreed that more was needed than merely introducing new systems to bring about the outcomes the group desired in Lifelong Learning.
- Delegates agreed that the **differences** in member **countries languages in defining education** impacted and determined the philosophical base, which underpinned their educational structures. For example, German has two words, which could be used to translate the English word "Education", different European countries use the word formation in quite distinct ways.
- This led to a discussion on the relationship between **language and culture**. All agreed that to promote and develop understanding between races in the world, language was a key element. England lamented that foreign languages, which had been promoted in the English Curriculum in the 80's and 90's, were now being reduced in terms of curricular time. In other European countries languages are accorded more status and importance in key skills and Lifelong Learning.
- The European Memorandum on Lifelong Learning was referred to throughout the conference, however, all agreed that there was no **common agreement in participating countries of the words "education, formation, learning, and Lifelong Learning."** Therefore aspects of the document were open to wide interpretation. (See attached paper on definitions of the word 'education').
- A detailed presentation on **research in England on Lifelong Learning was given**. This provoked some robust discussion of the English education system and its' outcomes. Delegates were shocked that only 70% of students remained in education after 16, and that in some areas it was as low as 35%. They were amazed that 7 million people have poor basic skills. This provoked a discussion on **social class, race and gender in Lifelong Learning, and the learning opportunities available to refugees and immigrants**.
- Delegates shared how the State and the Church supported **immigrants and refugees** in Lifelong Learning in their countries and some very **good practice was shared**.
- The London seminar **included both formal and informal learning**. The theme of **social class and its impact on citizens lives was** explored in the play „**Blood Brothers**“ which the group enjoyed at a London theatre. A number of the participants commented afterwards that the play had enabled them to understand how social class interacts with education in England more so than what they had heard or read in the seminar or in their academic studies. The participants all felt that the organisation of the London seminar, which had placed informal and formal

learning equally in the programme, had again made them reflect on how each is valued in their own mind.

- The group shared who the **target** groups were in each country for State funding in **Lifelong Learning** and how this related to issues of prior attainment, gender, class, race, refugees, income, employability, social regeneration, economic and neighbourhood regeneration.
- The **role of the Catholic Church** in the above was discussed and how this was delivered in practical projects.
- The delegates shared their **observations** from **walking around London** and visiting shops, museums, art galleries and travelling on London transport.
- Some interesting **comments** were made by participants based on the **informal learning arising from above**

"London is a society that can't be organised, it has firm laws and organisation in some areas i.e. the pubs which close at 11.00pm. but great freedom for citizens in other areas. These tensions sit well together and it works, rather like Lifelong Learning. London is so busy yet it has such wonderfully quiet places such as the parks. This is needed in learning, strong stimulation but time for reflection too!"

"The people sleeping under the blankets in the London stations, are they the underclass that were created by Thatcher's restructuring of British society - Will they be the terrorists of tomorrow? - What is the British State doing to include them in Lifelong Learning? - Are they growing? - Did poverty disappear in Britain and then come back even stronger, that is how it seems to me as a visitor to London."

- The European Memorandum opens by placing equal weight on education for employability and citizenship and celebrating "People as treasures of society". The delegates welcomed this but believed that equal weighting should be given to the religious and spiritual. Delegates believed that ongoing spiritual and religious education is an essential element of Lifelong Learning. Indeed an education is not an education without this, as they all shared the belief that a person's striving for unity with God is at the heart of their being. Hungary shared how "money" is the new treasure in Hungary since the wall came down.
- Lifelong learning was seen by some in the group as the ultimate victory for the movement for non-formal education in so far as that for the first time in history there is a leveling out of formal and non-formal learning.  
However it may be that it is as much about a push to ensure employability in a Europe that is aging and needs to import some aspects of its labour force from outside Europe as about an agenda which is beginning to value Lifelong Learning for all.
- Other themes were discussed: e.g. the shift from participation to inclusion, from social citizen" to „active citizen“ and how this might be achieved.

- Hungary illustrated the role of private companies in Lifelong Learning and other participants further developed this theme.
- There were also wide variations in the how the Catholic Church was defining and delivering education in the participating countries. This theme will be picked up in more detail in a later seminar.

#### The next seminar in Austria

The theme will be "Employability".

Should our organisations be involved in this aspect of Lifelong Learning? Are they involved, if so what is their contribution?

Key statistics were asked from each country in reference to participation in Lifelong Learning (i.e. education after 16)