

Background Note

Beyond chalk and talk: creativity in the classroom¹

This debate under the auspices of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation will focus on the future of education in Europe. How can schools and universities foster the creative and innovative capacity of pupils and students, helping them to develop and apply it throughout their life and in the future labour market? How does teaching in classrooms and lecture halls need to be adapted to achieve this? How can we meet the challenges of the future by investing in Europe's most important resource: its human capital?

Increasingly, there is a recognition that education systems need to change fundamentally: from imparting knowledge to equipping pupils and students with the right skills to find their own solutions to complex problems and to learn how to learn, acquiring the skill of gathering and processing knowledge in the information age. In other words, pupils and students need to learn how to be creative and innovative.

Europe's education systems need to adapt their approach to learning and teaching, to focus on fostering pupils' and students' capacities, their creativity and their innovation potential, rather than simply following the traditional model of transmission of knowledge: "Education should foster more innovative and creative mindsets, focusing on dealing with all-pervasive complexity, encouraging learning-by-doing, opportunity creation and problem-solving rather than knowledge transmission."² But how far are Europe's education systems designed to deliver this?

Education systems also need to move with the times. Europe's economies and societies are changing. The jobs of the future call for new skills; and new social needs call for new solutions. The ambassadors of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation declared that it is necessary to 'reform education systems across Europe, including higher education, but also school education. Education must provide the necessary new skills for tomorrow's jobs, as well as providing for non-material human needs.'³

Innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets are the key to the future. The industrial society, which shaped and modernised Europe's societies, is transforming quickly into a largely services-based, knowledge-driven society. Knowledge has become the key input, more important than land, labour and capital. But are Europe's education systems, from the basic to the most advanced levels of education, designed to prepare for this new society?

Creating value in non-material ways has become an increasingly important factor in our social and economic life. The importance of the knowledge component is rapidly increasing even in traditional industrial and service sectors. Education institutions have become significant economic players in their own right. Not only do education systems have to provide graduates with the right skills, they are often a key component in innovation, providing research and working with industry and the public sector to develop new ideas, products and processes. Our economies, social structures, political systems and parties, public services and education need to change and adapt. Are Europe's education systems prepared for this challenge?

¹ This background note has been prepared by the European Policy Centre (<http://www.epc.eu/>) to accompany the second debate organised under the auspices of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation on 30 March 2009.

² http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Events/eyci2009_09-01-07_ambassadors-conclusions-recommendations.pdf

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Europe is more and more exposed to global competition – and in this environment Europe needs to continuously invest in its human capital to stay at the cutting edge and remain competitive in high value-added, knowledge sectors, that can create jobs and stimulate growth and thus continue to generate wealth and sustain Europe's social models and the quality of life of its citizens. Global competition for talent is also increasing, for example, amongst universities to attract international students. Europe's education systems need to provide the quality and interest that will place them at the forefront in attracting talent.

Learning will have to take place throughout life to cope with present and future challenges and with the fast-changing demands of the new economy. The ambassadors of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation called for Member States and the EU institutions to 'develop people's and organisations' competences to engage and deal with change and complexity and to take risks, including investment in lifelong learning and active labour market policies.'⁴ But have we fully grasped what the idea of lifelong-learning means? Education is the key policy tool to develop and empower people who can integrate and flourish in society and in the labour market. Good integration of education policy with other economic and social policies is central to growth, competitiveness, and cohesion in Europe.

The ambassadors of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation called for increased investment in research, innovation, human capital and education, noting that 'it would be a fundamental mistake to cut R&D and education spending in the current crisis. This investment is needed to set the foundations for the future.'⁵ The future for Europe lies in education. To guarantee Europe's future, we need to invest in and reform our education policy now.

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⁴ http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Events/eyci2009_09-01-07_ambassadors-conclusions-recommendations.pdf

⁵ http://create2009.europa.eu/fileadmin/Content/Downloads/PDF/Events/eyci2009_09-01-07_ambassadors-conclusions-recommendations.pdf