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CONCLUSIONS

The Scientific Committee would like to begin the presentation of its conclusions of the Conference by underscoring the key concept which has permeated the content of every session in which we have taken part: INNOVATION, a promoter of continuous improvement and instigator of change.

It is clear to the Committee that participants understand innovation as a process rather than a moment. innovation initiatives are conceived, planned, developed and assessed, all devised as a continuously repeating cycle.

The Framework Paper that opened the working group sessions presented the track record of the firm Irizar, whose strategic vision includes being *" a benchmark for innovation"* as an essential requirement. With this goal as a foundation, the customers, professional competition, teamwork, knowledge acquisition and transfer, shared experience and learning, and personal trust make up the pillars upon which the business project is built.

The Committee understands that the Framework Paper provides a group of indicators solid enough to fill the term innovation with content, and differentiates between the innovation processes typical of human capital (individuals and teams) and the process of innovation associated with structural capital (quality of products and services, making use of new technologies, cooperation with external agents).

This way the strategic, executive and relational perspectives are linked, thus conciliating every organisation's individual expectations and objectives.

Based on this reference framework, the Conference provided us with the opportunity to learn about *different innovation experiences*, some in the planning stage

and others already implemented. Basically they can be divided into four areas: learning centre/enterprise relations; proposals associated with the accreditation of non-formal learning; new initiatives revolving around quality models; and reflections on the use of NITs for educational purposes.

The conclusions set forth below are organised around these four areas.

a) LEARNING CENTRE/ENTERPRISE RELATIONS

The Committee wishes to underline five teachings, or general criteria, which we feel synthesise the content of the different working documents concerned with developing links between vocational training and production systems. These teachings seem to answer to a principle which should prevail in a new phase of cooperation development and which can be formulated as follows: in the framework of the knowledge society, no institution, particularly schools and enterprise, can on its own expect to attain the level of professional competence needed for employment aptitude.

Below is a description of the teachings:

- Learning centre/enterprise cooperation, or cooperation between production and training systems, is not only desirable; a number of practical experiences have shown that this sort of relationship is possible and that it offers mutual benefits.
- In order to calculate the value of learning centre/enterprise cooperation it must be understood that production activity is also a process of learning and training, and that the training process also implies a process oriented towards the provision of services.
- The intensive use of new technologies must encourage the development of common learning cores, promoting stronger relations between learning centres and enterprise.
- There are many formulas for transfer and cooperation. Instead of following a general standard, they should answer to the needs of the areas of reference. In this sense, the Committee would like to underline five of the different yet complementary experiences it has become familiar with:

• The specific cooperation experience between GKN and IMH, by which GKN was initially the customer and IMH the supplier, but eventually both benefited significantly in the areas of education, training and knowledge updating.

• The collaboration between Rolls-Royce and Granfield University is a more permanent model of interaction. The company benefits from the transfer of technology and knowledge, which affects the product making process itself, and the university gains access to a field of applied research, which leads to publications, congresses, doctorate courses and the incorporation of its own graduates.

• The North Carolina Community College System is organised around a stable, cluster-based structure which channels relations between operational centres, learning centres and state and community colleges, establishing permanent contact between training, research and production in the area of biotechnology.

• Siemens Cooperates with Education is an example of telelearning possibilities in the framework of company strategies based on cooperation with the training system.

• Lastly, the experience of the vocational schools in Weiden, Germany, which specifically concentrate on a model of "school as enterprise," not only through developing standard communication platforms for educational, professional and domestic use, but also by providing a wide range of market-oriented services.

- The heterogeneity and geographical diversity of the experiences passed on to us makes it clear that learning centre/enterprise cooperation is no longer simply a declaration of principles; it is now an experience which can deliver very favourable outcomes for training centres and companies alike. In fact, the transfer of knowledge between training centres and enterprise should today be considered a relevant innovation indicator.

b) ACCREDITATION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING

Given that the accreditation of formal and informal learning – through their respective qualifications systems – is becoming an ever-increasing challenge in the area of vocational training, the Scientific Committee feels it should underscore what in its view are the most important contributions presented in this area:

With regard to Ms Saarinen's presentation (see corresponding paper) on the Finnish system, the Committee wishes to call attention to the following points:

- The design of the competence assessment tests, regardless of the accreditation procedure followed.
- The existence of a flexible framework – made up of three types of qualifications – for the recognition of formal and informal learning.
- The role, makeup and competences of the Qualifications Committees, which articulate a flexible system adapted to demand, and with great response capacity to meet the needs of recognition of competences and qualifications among the adult population.

With reference to the papers of Mr Riche and Mr Rauillan (see corresponding papers) on the French system, we wish to point out the following:

- The principles of proximity and reactivity, the basis of the VAE mechanism (Validation des Acquis de L'Expériencie)
- The declarative formula, which understands the very exercise of describing a competence as a means of acquiring competence; the formula has had very positive repercussions not only for the adult population but also for the education-training system itself.

c) NEW QUALITY SYSTEMS

The contributions by Mr Tighe and Mr Orbea (see corresponding papers) made it clear that Quality Management Systems, far from being static, require continual revision and updating, especially in the case of educational organisations, whose peculiarities and the rigidity of some of their structures create limitations that must be overcome.

In this area the Committee wishes to highlight the following:

- In designing quality models special attention continues to focus on increasing the level of awareness and on the commitment of people and educational organisations to continue moving forward in providing better services.

- The considerable effort made to simplify the procedures set forth in the quality models can be considered one of the lines of innovation in this area.

- Although there are still different standards for establishing quality criteria, there has been an interest in making use of the capabilities and tools which shape them all, promoting synthesis initiatives which will undoubtedly benefit the target organisations.

- In concrete terms, the Committee wants to assess and collect the proposals attached to two specific models:

  • Investors in People is a model developed in Great Britain based on four key principles (commitment, planning, action and evaluating). One of its capabilities is being able to take advantage of the numerous and diverse experiences of the organisations which have taken part in its development. Based on a relatively simple implementation cycle, the model establishes a fluid relationship between the process of planning and evaluating.

  • ISO-IWA2 is an effort aimed at providing criteria and guidelines for defining quality processes required specifically by the training sector. Although the document does not intend to become a standard, it does mean to serve as a benchmark for implementing improvements in the area of education.

d) <u>REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF NITS FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES</u>

Without a doubt, the training capabilities of NITs depend to a large extent on the current and future capacity to develop strategies aimed at bridging the *digital gap* and giving ITs an instrumental role in innovation processes (backed with increasingly easier to use technologies). This was made evident by the different speakers and the Scientific Committee would like to confirm it.

Therefore, the Committee will try to summarise the most relevant contributions put forward by the speakers. With regard to the presentation by Mr Florez (see corresponding paper):

- From a general perspective, the Committee shares the speaker's conviction that NITs provide us with a great opportunity to increase public knowledge and level of

training, but they can also accentuate the differences between people, countries and sectors.

- The fundamental task is to first ensure access possibilities to an ever-increasing number of users, making sure that necessary adaptations are put in place in accordance with the respective sectorial objectives.

- As the access quantity and quality improves, NITs will constitute a strategic instrument in promoting training processes.

- New technologies will become an effective training instrument if advances are made in interface systems. Therefore knowing how the average user will deal with the information is fundamental.

Mr Regidor's presentation (see corresponding paper) focused on analysing the possibilities of TV for training activities. We feel the following points should be highlighted:

- Television and even radio are resources that can be put to very good use for teaching different contents.

- To strengthen this type of use we must deal with sociological issues (passive user attitude), technological issues (screen definition and bandwidth) and training issues (replacing natural learning with guided learning).

- The experience with EITB.net is a benchmark in improving services, generating and maintaining contents and sharing models and experiences.

Lastly, regarding Mr Mujika's presentation (see corresponding paper), the Committee would like to draw attention to the following points:

- The progressive view of an open and connected vocational training scheme, oriented towards gaining knowledge and based on the principles of accessibility, connectivity and interactivity, able to break down space and time barriers and extend training services to the society as a whole.

- The need to make a major effort in generating contents and making them available.

- The importance of granting educational centres a central role in managing new technologies.

- The need to make equipment and services more readily available to professionals, to promote training and recognition and to be able to count on personnel working specifically on the development of NITs.

- The possibility of using the modular structure of vocational training to foster greater development of e-learning courses.

Lastly, the Committee wishes to call attention to the importance of repeating gatherings of this type, albeit on different scales, between enterprise and training organisations. Such encounters are in themselves specific experiences in INNOVATION which can mark the different paths for cooperation and complementation.