

KEYCoNETWS

Key Competence Network on School Education



KEYCONET NEWSLETTER ISSUE 1 - JULY 2012

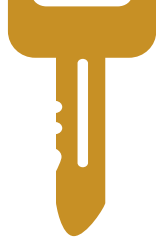
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EDITORIAL



Dear readers,

Welcome to the first issue of the KeyCoNet newsletter!

KeyCoNet is the European Policy Network on Key Competences in School Education, funded under the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. This newsletter (available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish) aims to keep readers up to date with the network's news, activities and outputs.

KeyCoNet News will be published three times a year and will cover regular updates on the network's activities, website and events, as well as incorporate EU and national news in this area, and dedicate a special focus on a specific aspect of key competence development. This current issue explores the assessment of key competences.

We wish you a pleasant read of this introductory newsletter, and look forward to sending you the next edition in October, including some results of the literature review currently in progress and more snapshots of key competence development initiatives across Europe.

*Caroline Kearney (Project Manager)
on behalf of the KeyCoNet Network.*

ABOUT KEYCONET - THE KEY COMPETENCE NETWORK:

KeyCoNet is focused on analyzing initiatives on the implementation of key competences in primary and secondary school education across Europe. During the project's three year lifetime, the research partners will produce and update a literature review aimed at grounding policy and practice in the most recent evidence on Key Competence Development (KCD) available in Europe. Network partners will select initiatives to be developed into brief case notes, and the most interesting will be developed into case studies (detailed analyses based on a rigorous methodology) drafted by researchers and policy analysts. The most inspiring case studies will be filmed to illustrate practice in action.

Moreover, each year, peer learning visits will take place in a country where an interesting KCD reform has been identified, and a European mapping and country overviews will also be produced and made available on our website, monitoring the state of progress of KCD in various countries across Europe. On the basis of the evidence collected via these outputs, recommendations for policy and practice will be produced regarding the enablers and obstacles to a holistic implementation of KCD.

Although this project uses the 2006 European Framework as a reference point (see EU

KCD News), we are aware that key competences can be expressed and understood in different ways, according to each national context. The network will therefore embrace an open and inclusive approach, and high priority issues used as guiding principles for the revision of the student curriculum (for example, a focus on the development of the whole child, health or sustainable environmental issues), will also be considered.



Among KeyCoNet's 18 partners, coming from 10 countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden), are Ministries of Education/ related agencies, universities/ research institutes, European organizations and practice related partners. This diverse partnership will allow for effective cross-fertilization between policy makers, researchers and practitioners.

EU KCD NEWS

EU POLICY BACKGROUND ON KCD

At EU level the most significant policy document to be produced in recent years in this area is the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006/962/EC)*.

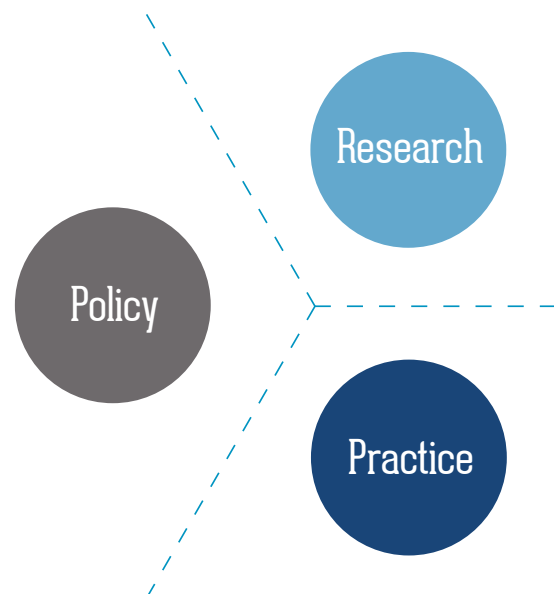
KeyCoNet will use the European framework on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning as a reference point, which includes the following 8 key competences:

- ➔ Communication in the mother tongue
- ➔ Communication in foreign languages
- ➔ Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- ➔ Digital competence
- ➔ Learning to learn
- ➔ Social and civic competences
- ➔ Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- ➔ Cultural awareness and expression

These key competences are all interdependent, and the emphasis in each case is on critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem

solving, risk assessment, decision taking and constructive management of feelings.

Following the 2006 EU Recommendation, the European Commission published two Communications *on Improving competences for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools*, and *Key competences for a changing world* in 2008. Later in 2010, the EU commissioned an expert report entitled *New skills for new jobs: action now*, which also addressed key competences at school level.



Moreover, the European Commission established the *Key Competences Peer Learning Cluster* within the framework of its Education and Training 2010 work programme, which has now been followed up by the *Assessment of Key Competences thematic working group*, as part of the updated 2020 work programme. The most recent action at EU level has been the European Commission's Directorate General for Education & Culture's 2011 call for proposals to develop policy advice for the implementation of the 2006 EU Recommendation, to which the KeyCoNet project is a response.

NATIONAL KCD NEWS

We are in the process of identifying and collecting national KCD initiatives, so that we can select some from a variety of European countries to show case through case notes, to be written by the coordinators of the initiatives. So far we have identified interesting initiatives in this area in Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Finland, France, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, and Sweden. A group of these initiatives focus on a wide range of key competences, spreading across subject-based and transversal competences. Examples of such initiatives can be found in Belgium, where a thorough reform of the curriculum for general and vocational secondary education has put all key competences at the centre, and in Sweden where the *Future Competences* programme, stretching across all education levels, provides teachers with training and support in change management in order to effectively integrate competences into the existing Swedish national curriculum. Schools are asked to establish an Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from working life as well as teachers and students, to advise on how to incorporate key competences into the curriculum and ensure close contact with the requirements of the world of work.

Ireland has also recently introduced a *key skills framework* at secondary level, and is now planning implementation at primary level also. In 2010 a pilot in France concerning 166 lower and upper secondary schools

introduced the *livret de compétences expérimental* which promotes the valorisation of key competences students acquire outside of school. The pilot has just finished and an evaluation report is being prepared for September 2012, before deciding whether to extend and generalize the action. We will report on this evaluation in our next newsletter.



Other national initiatives concentrate on one or more specific competences, such as in Austria and Portugal, where the focus is on digital competence. In Austria *pilots are being run in over 100 schools* on integrating the use of digital learning resources in Moodle, into the lower secondary ICT curriculum, while in Portugal teacher training sessions are being provided and a community of practitioners around the *EduScratch forum* is being built to support teachers in their digital competence development.

SPECIAL FOCUS ON: ASSESSMENT OF KEY COMPETENCES

This issue's special focus highlights some of the evidence found in the Institut français de l'éducation (IFE) recently published dossier on the challenges of assessing competences. There is often a tendency to put knowledge and competences in opposition, prizing knowledge as the guardian of culture and humanity and competences as utilitarian tools aimed at achieving immediate economic and social gains. However, as Olivier Rey (our KeyCoNet member from IFE) argues, competences in fact complement knowledge by giving us the ability to apply this knowledge in different contexts. By focusing on the acquisition of competences students can become active players in their learning, rather than passive consumers of static knowledge.



While much attention in recent years has been dedicated to the definition of key competences and how they might be integrated into the curriculum, the challenging issue of how to assess them has not yet been fully addressed. When assessing knowledge, the mechanisms

required remain the same in every context making it possible to create procedures to facilitate their reproducibility. Basic mathematical formulas or grammar rules would be examples. This is not the case however, when it comes to assessing competences. Here, the task to be accomplished changes according to the context. Therefore mastering memorized procedures is not sufficient in this case, as the student needs to also correctly interpret the situation at hand in order to choose the appropriate combination of procedures to be able to complete the task. Following this logic, subject knowledge no longer becomes an end in itself, but rather a tool for dealing with various situations.

Rey suggests that we can analyze a student's progressive development of a competence in three phases: a first phase would consist of a successful example of being competent in one situation; a second phase would be spelling out explicitly what components allowed for this success; and a third phase would be using the competence successfully in a new situation. For this reason the evaluator's or teacher's role is not simply to assess a de-contextualized result, but rather to observe how a competence is developed and adapted to be used in different situations.

Placing competences at the heart of learning throws into question the relevance of assessing students through grading, which favours the teaching and acquisition of bites of knowledge, often disconnected and independent of one another. For this reason in some countries efforts have been made to find alternative assessment solutions. Methods such as portfolios or progress work books have been popular and relatively easy to accept and integrate at primary level, while at secondary level, where the stakes are higher, this has proved much more of a challenge.

Moreover, assessing competences does not always suit the traditional method of testing students individually, as learning through problem-solving lends itself naturally to team work for example, and the ability to collaborate may in fact be the competence one wishes to assess. Likewise, contextualizing problems in real life, authentic situations, is not compatible with standardized testing.



In relation to the eight key competences listed in the EU framework, the first three (namely: Communication in the mother tongue; Communication in foreign languages and Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology) are intensely assessed through traditional subjects, but often only in their own discipline, when they could be usefully assessed in other contexts also. By contrast, the five remaining transversal key competences are much more rarely assessed, whether through national exams or school based tests. This is also the case for the cross-cutting themes which stretch across all the key competences (including critical thinking and decision taking for example), as well as for attitudes (such as a sense of initiative).

In order to face this challenge other modes of assessment, including portfolios, self-evaluation and peer evaluation, particularly using digital tools, are being developed. According to David Pepper (an expert working on assessment issues in this area and collaborating on KeyCoNet), in order to successfully assess key competences, we firstly need to better define them by decomposing them into sub-competences and associating these to concrete learning outcomes. Following this, we need to alter the methods of assessment by ensuring that the components of the key competences (knowledge, competences and attitudes) are assessed in interaction with one another rather than in isolation, while taking into account that the relationship between the three components is neither linear nor uniform. Finally, the focus of the assessment must be on the application of the competences in context and concern the process as well as the outcomes of learning. This would suggest that assessments at school level are more conducive to evaluating key competences than large scale standardized exams.

For further reading on this issue please see Rey, O. (2012). "*Le défi de l'évaluation des compétences*". Dossier d'actualité, veille et analyses, no. 76, Juin 2012, Institut français de l'éducation (in French), and Pepper, D. (2011). "*Assessing Key Competences across the Curriculum - and Europe*". European Journal of Education, vol. 46, no. 3.

KEYCONET WEBSITE

<http://keyconet.eun.org>

The KeyCoNet website was launched online in April 2012. The website has been designed to keep you up to date with the network's news, activities and outputs on key competence development across Europe. It is here you can also register for KeyCoNet's newsletter and check previous issues in the archive.

A central component of the website is the search tool which gives you access to all the project's results, and can be searched by country, competence concerned, as well as the type of output available. The project's outputs are currently being produced and will be uploaded to the website during the course of the project, as soon as they become available.

KEY COMPETENCES EVENTS

Since April of this year our KeyCoNet partners have been organizing national networking events to promote the network and raise awareness of the work we are doing at national level. So far events have taken place in Stockholm, Rotterdam, Bad Hofgastein, Brussels, Lyon and Braga. You can access information about the events that have taken place, including presentations etc. as well as upcoming events on our website.

These national networking events will be organized annually, and by attending them you will have the chance to learn more about the network's activities and results, and discuss the possibility of your organization being associated to the network. The network aims to increase the number of participating countries

and expand the diversity of its stakeholders. Check our website to see if a national networking event is taking place somewhere near you.



GET INVOLVED!



Would you like to contribute to the work of KeyCoNet? Then here's how!

- ➔ Share your key competence development initiative/s with us by drafting case notes on the basis of guidelines that your national coordinator will provide you with on request
- ➔ Apply to become an associate or full member of the network by indicating your interest to your national coordinator

How can you benefit from KeyCoNet?

- ➔ Engage with the project's outcomes which will be provided on our website as they become available during the network's 3 year lifetime.

FIND OUT MORE
PARTNERS:

INFORMATION ABOUT OUR NETWORK'S

MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION / NATIONAL AGENCIES



<http://www.bmukk.gov.at>



<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/wegwijs/AKOV>



<http://www.education.gouv.fr/>



<http://www.dgidec.min-edu.pt/>
(national coordinator)



<http://www.ncca.ie/>



<http://www.tiigrihype.ee/>

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES



<http://ife.ens-lyon.fr/ife>
(national coordinator)



<http://www.eiesp.org>



<http://www.statpedu.sk>



<http://www.ie.uminho.pt/>



<http://www.ie.ul.pt>



<http://www.uv.uio.no/pfi/english/>



<http://www.cicero.fi>
(national coordinator)



<https://www.jyu.fi/en/>

PRACTICE-RELATED PARTNERS



<http://www.ja-ye.eu>



<http://www.rektorsakademien.se>

CONTACT US

European Schoolnet is the coordinator of the KeyCoNet project and we are happy to hear from you whether you are interested in receiving further information or providing us with suggestions. Contact us at: info@keyconet.eun.org

ABOUT EUROPEAN SCHOOLNET

EUN is a network of 30 Ministries of Education in Europe and beyond, and was created 15 years ago to bring innovation in teaching and learning to its key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers and researchers.

European Schoolnet's activities are divided among three areas of work:

- Policy, research and innovation: information sharing and evidence building.
- Schools services: enhancing cooperation between schools across Europe.
- Advocacy: how ICT and digital media contribute to transforming teaching and learning processes.

EUN (European Schoolnet) : Rue de Trèves 61 B-1040 Brussels - <http://www.eun.org>
Tel: +32 (0)2 790 75 75 - fax: +32 (0)2 790 75 85

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