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e-Skills for innovation are crucial for the EU

The European e-Skills 2009 conference delivered key messages on the developments and significance of e-skills for the European economy and society. Experts from governments, academia, associations, trade unions and industry emphasised the importance of e-skills and professionalism for innovation and business value creation. While ICT increases its importance in strategic and operational aspects of the economy and society, it is now a key component of the new skills requirements for new jobs. E-skills for entrepreneurs, managers, ICT practitioners and users are crucial for fostering innovation and competitiveness. The EU e-skills strategy has progressed with several visible achievements in promoting e-skills and ICT related jobs. Further developing the long term e-skills strategy to encompass higher level innovation skills is a necessity and a logical next step for supporting European growth and competitiveness.

The conference was organised on 20 November 2009 in Brussels by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee in partnership with the Council of European Professional Informatics Societies (CEPIS), the e-Skills Industry Leadership Board and other leading stakeholders. The conference acknowledged that all the major action lines set out in the EU e-skills agenda in 2007 have been addressed: strengthening partnerships and cooperation, supporting human resources investment for e-skills, promoting the attractiveness of ICT education and careers, developing digital literacy and e-competences for the workforce, and enhancing lifelong learning of e-skills. Concrete results such as the European e-Competence Framework and the European e-Skills and Careers portal have recently been complemented with the drawing up of forecasts and foresight scenarios on the demand and supply of e-skills, the development of European e-competence curriculum guidelines, the analysis of existing financial and fiscal incentives for e-skills training and support initiatives, the study of e-learning exchange mechanisms, and the further development of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

One of the main themes of the conference was the need to understand, recognise and promote ICT professionalism. Professionalism fosters quality, innovation and universal benefits for the economy and society. Presentations noted that the essential components of ICT professionalism are knowledge, skills and experience, together with an accountable and ethical professional attitude to quality. Professionalism is recognised by peers and shows itself through external validation and recognition. It was agreed that

further work on developing, validating and certifying ICT professionalism is needed. New initiatives were suggested to develop a European framework for the definition and the promotion of ICT professionalism and professions based on the European e-Competence Framework, work from CEPIS and the Innovation Value Institute, as well as to promote a more accurate image of the ICT profession and the variety of activities where it supports real business value.

ICT is a global and pervasive technology, continuously increasing in importance in strategic and operational areas of the European economy. E-skills are becoming a key component of the new skills requirements for new jobs. In particular, e-skills for entrepreneurs, managers and users, not only ICT practitioners, are crucial for fostering innovation and competitiveness. Concrete projects and experiences were presented to show how e-skills for developing innovative solutions can contribute, for example, to developing green IT and more environmentally friendly products and services.

The conference emphasised that jobs and their skills requirements are changing. Collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and entrepreneurship are becoming increasingly important and ICT can provide support by enabling new opportunities for knowledge and value creation. Partnership and social dialogue play a key role. Skills for benefiting from ICT and for making the most effective use of ICT are crucial. They play a key role in enabling the design and the development of innovative products, processes and services. Furthermore, they provide an important contribution to the development of an environmentally friendly and sustainable society. To take full advantage of the strategic and operational opportunities offered by ICT solutions, it is clear that more and better qualified ICT practitioners as well as e-skilled entrepreneurs and managers are needed. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are important for supporting e-skills for new high-quality jobs that foster competitiveness and innovation.

There was a strong consensus that a long term EU e-skills strategy is more important than ever in the context of the crisis. Analysis and foresight on supply and demand of e-skills in Europe show that in most scenarios the demand of e-skills is likely to outstrip the supply. However, the emphasis of the demand will increasingly shift from lower level skills to higher level, cognitive, problem-solving and entrepreneurial e-skills and to the needs emerging from the future Internet and green technologies. Organisations need to invest not only in infrastructure but in the higher level e-skills of their workforce. Several presentations stressed the fact that the critical factor for future success in Europe is the capacity for the competitive application of technologies.

A European agenda for economic recovery and growth cannot disregard the important role of e-skills and professionalism for innovative capacity, the future Internet, green technologies and social inclusion. Since in the contemporary economy and society, e-skills are a crucial part of higher level innovation skills, broadening the EU e-skills agenda to support innovation skills is becoming not just a natural further development but a necessity. The results and the experiences gained with e-skills provide many valuable lessons for the development of an EU innovation skills strategy. While the responsibility for implementation rests with Member States, it would be supported with actions that

bring added value on European level, with relevant funding instruments and regular monitoring.

As a next step, the European e-Skills Week, a major awareness raising campaign, was announced in the conference. It will take place during the first week of March 2010 and will promote awareness of the growing demand for highly skilled ICT practitioners and the importance of e-skills in today's society. With a wide range of pan-European and national events in European countries organised by different stakeholders, it aims to increase e-skills and to encourage young people to take up ICT studies and careers. A suggestion was also made to strengthen the inclusion and integration of Roma and handicapped children by developing their e-skills.

In conclusion, the conference demonstrated excellent cooperation among stakeholders and a strong consensus on the good progress and continuing need for strategic support for e-skills both for the workforce and citizens. The EU e-skills strategy provides a very good and recognised basis for developing a long term strategy for innovation skills that support innovation, growth, competitiveness, social inclusion and sustainability in the European economy and society. To that end, a conference report presenting the detailed conclusions and recommendations will be ready before the end of December.

Background

The European Commission adopted in September 2007 a Communication on "e-Skills for the 21st Century" presenting a long term e-skills agenda and including five major action lines at the European level. The Competitiveness Council of Ministers welcomed this Communication and adopted Conclusions on a long term e-skills strategy at its meeting on 22-23 November 2007. Stakeholders have established the e-Skills Industry Leadership Board to contribute to implementing the strategy.

More information

E-Skills for the 21st Century, European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry
<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/ict/e-skills>

European e-Skills 2009 Conference: Fostering ICT professionalism
<http://www.eskills-pro.eu>

European e-Competence Framework
<http://www.ecompetences.eu>

E-Skills Industry Leadership Board
<http://www.e-skills-ilb.org>

European e-Skills and Careers portal
<http://eskills.eun.org>