## ETUCE views on Revision of Key Competences
*Adopted by ETUCE Bureau on 18 May, 2017*

### Background

The European Parliament and the Council adopted in 2006 the [Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.](#)
According to the Recommendation, key competences are for all individuals and relevant for all education and training sectors (schools, vocational education and training, higher education, adult learning) as well as for non-formal and informal learning.

Key competences should be acquired by young people during their compulsory education and training, and via non-formal and informal learning, and also by adults throughout their lives, through a process of developing and updating skills.

The Framework sets out eight key competences each being a combination of *knowledge, skills and attitudes*. The eight key competences are:

- 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; and
- Cultural awareness and expression.

The eight key competences contributed to developing the *learning outcomes approach*. Since 2006, EU countries have been translating and adapting the eight key competences to the country specific context (including extending them), and introducing them into their education and training systems.
However, in several countries implementation was not successful and a revision is necessary to update the Framework to fit new socio-economic challenges and the evolvement of digital technologies.

Therefore, the **European Commission opened a public consultation** on the review of Key Competences for lifelong learning, which is available **in all EU languages** until **19 May** at the [consultation website](#).

*The public consultation asks the opinion of the stakeholders on the definitions of the key competences and on the Key Competences Framework as a whole.*

*ETUCE Education Advisory Panel members were consulted on the below ETUCE views.*

**ETUCE views**

From ETUCE's perspective it seems that challenges remain on the design and application of the Key Competences Framework:

1. ETUCE considers the revision necessary to reflect the **new socio-economic, political and ecological challenges** and the evolvement of digital technologies in the last 10 years. While the recent Key Competences Framework has not been fully implemented in many countries, we are concerned that the revision will contribute to **new, unnecessary educational reforms** and the revision of the National Qualifications Frameworks.

2. One of the obstacles to implementation is the **lack of a clear audience** of the Key Competences Framework: who is the target group (national governments, policy makers, school heads, teachers or any other actors of the education sector)? We regret that the Key Competences Framework **is not tailor-made for the different actors**, for example it does not provide guidance to national policy makers how to adapt the Framework to national/local requirements and how to implement it.

3. **Social dialogue** is an essential tool to introduce the Key Competences Framework and to contribute to national reforms (if necessary) in order to properly implement the Framework.

4. Sustainable public investment in education and training is essential for skills and competence development and in order to better introduce the Key Competencies Framework into national systems.

5. It is essential to keep the Key Competences Framework **only as a guidance** to national and local education actors, and it should be broad and flexible enough to tailor-it to national and local circumstances and to **different types of learners** (e.g. refugees, socio-economically disadvantaged, learners with special/additional needs, etc.).

6. Additionally, the education authorities should provide **information sessions to educational actors** (such as school leaders, teachers, parents, students.) on the Key Competences Framework, and **training to teachers and school leaders** to ensure that it is actively used. While many times teachers are blamed for the failure of implementation, many of them still have not received any training since 2006 on the integration of the Framework to teaching and assessment. At the same time, the Framework does not provide any guidance to teachers on how to integrate it into their teaching, nor to learners on how to self-assess their learning outcomes. It is particularly important to prepare teachers and education personnel to provide effective support for students in all education sectors in acquiring key competences, with teachers themselves acquiring or continuously developing the key competences which they need for their work.

7. The main challenge of implementing the Key Competences Framework is that some key competences are either subject based (maths, foreign languages), or assessable/measurable (literacy in mother tongue), while others are transversal (e.g. social and civic competences). From ETUCE's perspective the Key Competences Framework should

not be considered as a target only of the formal education and training but also as part of non-formal and informal learning and the **competences should be acquired in all aspects of life**. Teaching social and civic competences should closely link to the implementation of the Paris Declaration. Some competences (e.g. creativity and ethics) should be addressed across the whole Key Competences Framework. In addition, environmental awareness and sustainability should be included in the list of competences.

8. There is a **lack of research-based information** on common competence mainstream status, challenges and opportunities in EU member states and on effective assessment of transversal competences.

**ETUCE's views on the Key Competences:**

**1. Definition of communication in mother tongue**

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

Communication in the mother tongue is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts; in education and training, work, home and leisure.

Strength: The basic right of using mother tongue is ensured in the Framework by this definition. Mother tongue is the basis of learning and it should not be reason of discrimination in education and training.
Weakness: The definition does not reflect upon increased mobility and upon the language background of pupils (bi-, tri-, multi-lingual children). In a multicultural environment it is difficult to teach in all mother tongues. Some key concepts are missing, e.g. literacy, acquisition and use of mother tongue in schools. It lacks recognition of other native languages and the entire possible linguistic repertoire of an individual's language use.

Proposal for changes:
- The definition should merge key competences "learning in mother tongue" and "learning languages" and include in the new key competence: "languages, literacy, plurilingualism, multiculturalism, intercultural and multilingual literacy".
- The definition should use "language 1 " and "language 2" instead of "mother tongue" and "foreign language".
- Literacy and language use should be added, also the digital aspects of literacy (online vs printed language).

**2. Definition of Communication in foreign languages**

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

Communication in foreign languages broadly shares the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in

Strength: The definition is broad and coherent, it links to cultural competences, and it has a flexible approach (reference to individual wills and needs).

Weakness: The word "foreign" can have negative connotation, it is better to use 2nd and 3rd languages beside of the mother tongue(s). Complexity, hierarchy and choice are not mentioned.

Proposals for changes:
- The two competences on languages should be merged.
- Mother tongue is the basis for learning other languages and cultures and learning this first language needs to be fully supported.
- The definition should mention acquisition also via non-formal and informal learning and through all the education and training sectors.
- The definition should recognise multilingual classrooms, learning environment and societies.

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## 3. Definition of Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

A. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Building on a sound mastery of numeracy, the emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge. Mathematical competence involves, to different degrees, the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought (logical and spatial thinking) and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs, charts).

B. Competence in science refers to the ability and willingness to use the body of knowledge and methodology employed to explain the natural world, in order to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions. Competence in technology is viewed as the application of that knowledge and methodology in response to perceived human wants or needs. Competence in science and technology involves an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and responsibility as an individual citizen

Strength: The definition is sufficiently comprehensive, it refers to sustainability and it is linked to the everyday situation.

Weakness: The definition does not have sufficient reference to active learning and it lacks mentioning critical thinking in the interpretation of data. The description is not inspiring and technology is not well defined in it.

Proposals for changes:
- The definition should include maths and science as two distinct competences under "cognitive development".
- Intellectual pursuit to the nature of sciences and technological to digital competence needs to be added.

- We think it would be useful to separate the technological and engineering competences into sections.

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## 4. Definition of Digital competence

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.

Strength: The definition is comprehensive. Good parts of the definition include terms 'confident use' and 'critical use', as well as the knowledge part of the definition which includes 'understanding the nature' of digital tools. It recognises all three dimensions of competence: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Weakness: The definition is too long and not broad enough. It lacks the focus on the use of digital competence in aspects of life and learning as a purpose.

Proposal for change:
- New definition: 'Digital competence includes the confident, critical, safe and ethical use of digital technologies for all aspects of life. It is underpinned by a continuous update of operational skills in digital technologies, media, innovations, and creativity'.
- It should include issues of privacy, data collection, security, identity, ethics, the online 'bubbles', and cyber-bullying, as well as consider different types of digital tools and devices.

## 5. Definition of learning to learn

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

'Learning to learn' is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This competence includes awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. This competence means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts: at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence.

Strength: The definition defines the competence as a subject in a transversal way. It is important that it exists and underpins the love of learning as a competence.

Weakness: The role of motivation is a value and should be recognised in the definition. It has an unclear scope and it should apply to any area of learning that the learner chooses to pursue. It should address adaptability and the diversity of learners. There is a contradiction between LLL and skills for employability.

Proposal for changes:
- It should recognise learning strategies, different learning paces, diversity of learners and individual and collective learning.
- It should include learning on all contents/subjects, reaching from basic skills towards complex skills.
- It should encompass life-long and life-wide learning, and seek to assess the learning process as it is national governments' responsibility to provide opportunities for their citizens to pursue lifelong learning.

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## 6. Definition of Social and civic competences

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

These include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.

Strength: It is important to have such a competence and the title is good as bringing social and civic together.
Weakness: The definition is too broad, it has too many overlaps and it should be clearer. Social and civic does not have the same weight. Knowledge and practice should be brought together and the definition should consider clearer individual and collective competences. Human dignity is a missing element. Political dimension in civic competence could be added. Global vs European social and civic competences should be considered.
Proposal for changes:
- The definition should include learning about how to practise these competences. Intercultural competence should be added to the definition and it should clarify the links with other competences. It should address the whole community, the whole education system, and the competences should be learnt in all education sectors.
- Global citizenship and global justice should be added, but also "civic and political" competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination.
- The definition should also highlight human dignity, address sustainability and link to governance, as well as, active citizenship.
- The definition needs to include learning to enhance critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to discrimination and indoctrination (Paris Declaration of March 2015).

## 7. Definition of Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship Competence

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports individuals, not only in their everyday lives at home and in society, but also in the workplace in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize

opportunities, and is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance.

Strength: The definition focuses on ideas, action, risk-taking, innovation, and creativity. It covers aspects of everyday life ('home', 'society', 'work place').

Weakness: It does not focus on value or 'good' ideas and actions. It is unclear and too broad and the term 'good governance' is unclear, while the term 'projects' has a short-term focus. Concepts such as team work, change-making, strategic thinking, goal setting, and mind-set or spirit are missing.

Proposal for changes:
- 1st sentence: … "ability to identify opportunities, implement ideas and sustain action "
- 2nd sentence: include: "strategical thinking, goal-oriented, forward-looking, good and ethical governance of process, including cooperation with and coordination of a team."
- 3rd sentence: This empowers individuals in all aspects of their lives.
- 4th sentence: included above. However, "ethical" is subjective and it should be explained in the competence framework as a transversal issue.
- Ethics should be addressed across the Key Competences Framework.
- The definition requires a new title to reflect a range of competences and it should highlight the importance of strategic thinking and maximising results from actions: "Initiative, strategic, entrepreneurial and creative competences"
- Entrepreneurship education needs to be considered in the context of the overall social – and not only business - environment.

## 8. Competence on Cultural awareness and expression

**DEFINITON of 2006:**

Appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts.

Strength: The definition respects diversity and includes inter-culturalism and European cultural values

Weakness: The definition focuses on the individual dimension and misses the community aspect. The definition is static and requires a broader definition of culture as currently, it only creates a notion of 'high' culture. The definition does not address the implications of measurement of cultural awareness and expression skills.

Proposal for changes:
- It is a passive definition and should reflect a more engaged, active expression as well as appreciation. The definition should be based on the concept of receptive and productive culture that students 'engage' with.
- A new working definition of culture as a 'dialogue' should be developed. The 'links' between cultural works and the process of understanding the 'heritage' should be reflected in the definition of the cultural awareness and expression skills. Cultural tools (including digital tools) are being part of cultural production and should be mentioned in the definition. Cultural skills should be represented as more active skills.

- Notions of appreciation and recognition of culture should be included in the definition of skills. Freedom to share a culture should be balanced by the knowledge of rights and responsibilities (for e.g. Intellectual Property rights).
- Creative skills should be addressed across the whole Key Competences Framework.