**Measures to combat educational disadvantage:
A European consultation symposium December 2011**

Rapporteur Report

Workshop 4: 'Working together for equity: Different policy fields, one objective'

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1.   The starting point for Workshop 4 was the observation in the Commission's 2006 *Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems* Communication that:

Educational policies alone cannot address educational disadvantage. There is an interplay of personal, social, cultural and economic factors which combine to limit educational opportunities. Cross-sectoral approaches are important to link education and training policies with those related to employment, the economy, social inclusion, youth, health, justice, housing and social services. Such policies should also be designed to correct regional imbalances in education and training.

The workshop therefore focused on links that might be made between the education and other sectors at all levels of education systems.

2.   The range of potential links of this kind is considerable. It is therefore useful to conceptualise them as falling into three broad approaches:

- *Individualised* approaches in which sectors work together to tackle the disadvantages faced by particular learners or groups of learners in particular education settings. These might take the form, for instance, of multi-professional teams based in and around schools and working with learners who have been identified as being in some way 'at risk'..
- *Ecological* approaches where sectors work together to tackle the social and economic problems apparent in particular localities which give rise to the disadvantages experienced by individual learners. These might take the form, for instance, of area-based initiatives in which education providers, a range of other public services, community groups and business and industry work together to enrich the employment opportunities, or improve health, or tackle street crime in particular localities.

- *Policy* approaches in which national or regional governments facilitate cross-sectoral work at local level, and bring national policies in different sectors into alignment. This might involve, for instance, developing policies to promote educational inclusion as part of a wide-ranging policy effort to tackle the social exclusion of marginalised groups, or developing childcare provision in schools as part of an effort to increase employment opportunities for parents.

3. Thinking of cross-sectoral links in this way is important because each of these different approaches has a contribution to make, and ideally they should support and enhance one another. The danger for policy makers and practitioners is that they focus too narrowly on one kind of approach. Where the focus is on individualised approaches alone, for instance, too little may be done to address the local and national conditions out of which individual disadvantages arise.

4. It is important to consider not only the level at which cross-sectoral approaches will operate, but also their aims. Such approaches can contribute to the narrow aim of raising attainments in the education system, or closing the attainment gaps between more and less advantaged groups of learners. However, they typically see attainments as one amongst a wide range of desirable outcomes from education – including, for instance, lifelong engagement with learning, health and well-being, social development, and adequate work and income. Cross-sectoral approaches are therefore likely to make their greatest contribution within the context of a holistic view of education. Workshop 1 used the notion of 'capability' in articulating such a holistic view, and this has much to offer.

5. The contribution of cross-sectoral approaches to more equitable outcomes needs to be set in the context of more fundamental equity-oriented policies. In particular:

- Cross-sectoral approaches need to be set in the context of macro- economic, fiscal and social policy focused on promoting greater levels of social equity. Essentially local and small-scale approaches should not be expected to counter the effects of socio-economic inequalities on their own.
- Cross-sectoral approaches should also be set in the context of policies to develop more equitable and inclusive education systems (issues dealt with by workshops 1 and 6). They should not be expected to overcome the marginalising effects of educational systems and practices which reproduce or exacerbate existing patterns of inequality.

6.	In the same way, there need to be realistic expectations of the contribution that schools and other education settings can make to cross-sectoral approaches. Schools and other settings can indeed work on a holistic educational agenda, engage with families and communities, and offer access points to other services. However, they cannot be expected to solve social problems on their own. Cross-sectoral approaches are not about giving schools a few extra resources and expecting them to eradicate inequality, nor are they about handing over the entire social agenda to school principals. Rather, they are about aligning what schools and settings can offer with what other sectors can do, and crossing the boundaries between sectors so that more powerful, coordinated strategies can emerge.

7.	There are multiple examples of cross-sectoral approaches – particularly at the individual learner and the locality levels – across European countries. Many specific examples were cited in the workshop and participants have been asked to supply details to Professors Edwards and Downes so that they can appear in their NESET report in due course. Most of these are 'grass-roots' initiatives, driven by local actors. They have the considerable advantage of enlisting local enthusiasm, notably amongst professionals. They may draw productively on the resources of non-governmental organisations such as churches and foundations. They can also develop interventions that are customised to local circumstances; indeed, a high level of local determination seems particularly important in this field. However, grass-roots initiatives are often limited in scope and duration, with little prospect of going to scale at national level. Typically, they deal with one or other form of cross-sectoral approach but do not articulate an overarching model which links approaches at the individual, ecological and policy levels. There is therefore much to learn from existing initiatives, but there is also a need for the development of overarching frameworks within which such efforts can be set.

8.	Some countries have pursued a more centrally-driven path, in which national government has played a key role in mandating change, establishing supportive frameworks, and targeting funding. These efforts have generated rapid structural change. However, it is less clear that they have secured total commitment from professionals and other actors in the system. Moreover, such centrally-driven programmes are vulnerable to political changes as a result of which they are downgraded in importance or abandoned altogether. The best solution is likely, therefore, to take the form of a mixture of grass-roots efforts supported by broadly-articulated and facilitative national frameworks. This pattern of development may need to be maintained for some time so that cross-sectoral work becomes embedded in the system, and may need to be built on the basis of political consensus as to its importance.

9. The holistic view of education implied by cross-sectoral approaches demands appropriate methods for monitoring outcomes. The current emphasis in many European education systems is primarily focused on monitoring attainment outcomes. Whilst these are important, single-focus monitoring approaches of this kind can distort actions at all levels of the system, and the pursuit of ever-higher test and examination scores can lead perversely to the exclusion of the most disadvantaged groups. In fact, many countries know relatively little about how learners – and, particularly, children and young people – are developing other than in terms of their measured attainments. Monitoring systems need to be constructed, therefore, to set attainment outcomes in a broader context of measures of engagement with learning, well being and life chances. These systems could usefully be constructed so that some or all of their elements facilitated cross-system comparisons which would allow countries to learn more easily from each other's successes and failures.

10. In the same way, initiatives to develop cross-sectoral approaches need to be evaluated in appropriate ways. Currently, many initiatives are not evaluated at all, or receive inappropriate evaluations which are unable to say much with certainty either about implementation processes or outcomes for learners. The implication is that far more initiatives need to be evaluated robustly and as a matter of course. In the case of small-scale local initiatives, formative evaluations are important for enabling local leaders to identify problems and successes as they emerge. However, these local evaluations also have to be accompanied by more ambitious evaluations which are capable of identifying outcomes with some certainty, and of demonstrating what kinds of actions and interventions are most successful in generating those outcomes. Evaluations of this kind are likely to be larger scale, longer term and more complex than is typically the case currently. In particular, they need to take into account that cross-sectoral initiatives are typically multi-strand, subject to (legitimate) variation in local implementation, set in open environments where many other factors help shape outcomes, and directed towards outcomes which may only become apparent in the longer term. This means that evaluations also need to pay attention to multiple outcomes and be sufficiently large-scale, complex and long-term to capture any outcomes that emerge. A particular danger is that governments and other sponsors will commission inappropriately simplistic evaluations based on an expectation that significant impacts on, say, attainment outcomes will be evident in the short term – and will then conclude that the failure of the evaluation to detect such impacts can be equated with the failure of the initiative itself. More appropriate and robust evaluation designs are available in this field, but evaluation commissioners have to

be prepared to fund them, stay with them for the long term, and make use of the complex findings they are likely to produce.

11. Many cross-sectoral initiatives have relied historically on additional funding, and might therefore be regarded as particularly vulnerable at a time of economic constraint across Europe. Whilst this pattern is understandable, it implies that such approaches are seen as optional extras to the core business of education systems, supported in the economic good times, but dispensable when times are hard. This represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of cross-sectoral approaches, which should be integral rather than peripheral to education systems. Such approaches do not necessarily demand additional resources so much as that existing resources are used in a different way. They imply a shift in focus away from dealing with manifest problems towards preventive work (at the level of learner, family and community) and away from slow-moving and tightly rationed crisis responses towards early intervention. Above all, they imply a move away from fragmented action by separate agencies towards coordinated – and therefore more efficient – interventions. Such approaches, therefore, can either save costs or (more probably) free up existing resources for dealing with a wider range of issues.

12. A major consideration for governments should be the costs of *not* implementing cross-sectoral approaches in terms of the social and educational problems that will need to be dealt with in future. A useful component of monitoring and evaluation systems, therefore, is cost-benefit analysis which takes account of these future implications in a way that standard outcomes evaluations alone cannot. A key role of central government is then to ensure that accounting and resourcing systems are constructed on the basis that the costs may need to be borne at one point in the system but returns may accrue at another point. So, for instance, early years provision may need to be resourced so that children do better in their secondary schools, and youth work may need to be resourced so that fewer adults spend their adult years in the criminal justice system. There are, of course, particular challenges to governments in maintaining this long view when there are pressures to make savings in the short term.

13. The development of cross-sectoral approaches typically involves professionals from one discipline working with their counterparts in other services. It may also involve some reshaping of roles so that professionals take on new responsibilities, or tasks are redistributed between professionals and non-professional co-workers. It is therefore important that attention is paid to how professionals understand their new roles and how they are equipped to play them. This is partly a matter of training, but it is also likely to require ongoing support for professionals and their

co-workers in the field. This has implications for how higher education institutions and local administrations set about professional development and support. There is, for instance, little prospect for embedded change if professional development continues to be conceptualised in terms of service silos, or if professionals cannot secure developmental support for the day-to-day problems they encounter as their roles are reconfigured.

14. There is also a role for central and local administrations in developing common frameworks of understanding across professions. All professions working with disadvantaged learners should have access to a shared set of outcomes, a shared analysis of the causes of disadvantage, and a clear understanding of their respective roles in combating disadvantage. These frameworks can be developed at national (and trans-national) level, and then refined and customised to fit local circumstances. A particular issue here is that no one professional group should be asked to carry undue responsibility for improving the full range of outcomes. There is a particular danger that cross-sectoral approaches create inappropriate expectations of what teachers can achieve, just as they do with schools and settings. Teachers in particular may well be able to do more for their students than they have typically been asked to do in many systems, but extending their role is only possible where the collaborative support they receive from other professionals and non-professionals is also extended.

15. There are good reasons why most initiatives in this field have tended to be professionally-driven. However, there is a danger of entrenching the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups by excluding them from decisions about their lives. People facing disadvantage should be involved in the design of initiatives and services. They should also have a voice in their evaluation. This is not only a matter of correcting power imbalances. Children and communities facing disadvantage are likely to understand their situations in a way that can help initiatives become more effective, and they may have, or be able to develop, the capacity to tackle many of their own problems.

16. Many examples of cross-sectoral working involve health services and professionals. This may be no coincidence. There is an established field of Public Health which seeks to improve health outcomes by tackling the underlying causes of ill-health in social conditions. Latterly, the World Health Organisation has undertaken significant work to identify and tackle the 'social determinants of health' as a means of tackling inequalities in health outcomes. This work is currently being taken forward in the WHO Euro region as part of the broader *Health 2020* agenda. Since health an educational inequalities are shaped by a similar set of 'social

determinants', there may be potential for common approaches in these field. In particular, the idea of a 'social determinants' approach may provide a useful conceptual framework, and one which outlines a clear place for cross-sectoral work in tackling those determinants.

17. There are some clear ***implications for the European Commission*** from the findings of this workshop. Some of the actions suggested below are, of course, already being taken forward:

- The Commission might take a lead in articulating a framework to encourage and support cross-sectoral approaches in member countries. Such a framework cannot and should not be over-prescriptive, but it can give administrations and practitioners in member countries a set of conceptual tools for thinking about how cross-sectoral approaches might be developed in their contexts.
- The Commission might take a lead in articulating an outcomes framework for monitoring cross-sectoral work which goes beyond the monitoring of attainment outcomes.
- The Commission might take a lead in constructing data sets to populate the outcomes framework, drawing perhaps on already-available statistical information and on local analyses by its expert networks.
- The Commission could encourage cross-sectoral working by ensuring that educational disadvantage is seen as a cross-DG issue rather than as one which is solely the concern of those working directly on education and training. A search for synergies with the WHO 'social determinants' approach may be particularly helpful here.
- Given that national governments may be reluctant to commit new funding to developmental work at this time, the Commission might usefully support some exploratory, grass-roots projects, particularly if these were clearly located within, and sought to contribute to, an overarching conceptual framework.

18. An outline ***conceptual framework*** is annexed to this report. It captures in diagrammatic form many of the issues raised here. It shows:

- The aims of education (and hence of cross-sectoral working) as being about holistic and equitable learner development – which might be conceptualised as the development of 'capabilities'.
- A three-pronged approach to the pursuit of these aims, through:
  1. The improvement of the education system so that it is fit for purpose in the sense of being inclusive and equitable

2.	An approach to work with individual learners and their families in which boundaries are crossed between education and other services by, for instance, extending the role of schools and education settings, and developing multi-agency teams

3.	 'Ecological' approaches in which local determinants of educational disadvantage are tackled through area-based initiatives and strategies.

- Support for this three-pronged approach from:

1.	The recognition of the agency of its intended 'beneficiaries', i.e. the learners, families and communities experiencing disadvantage

2.	National policy frameworks which co-ordinate policy initiatives across sectors, facilitate cross-sectoral work, and monitor its outcomes in appropriate ways

3.	Coordinated macro-level policy efforts to tackle disadvantage and inequality at source.

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**Holistic & equitable leaner development
('capabilities')**

**Schools & settings
fit for purpose**
System wide
improvement strategy

Crossing boundaries
Extending school capacity
Building coordinated support
Multi-agency teams

Ecological approaches
Tackling local determinants
of disadvantage
Area based approaches
Local policy integration

earner, family & community agency

Enabling policy & monitoring frameworks

Policies to tackle inequality & disadvantage