News Item, 30/08/2010, Gütersloh: Denmark leads the European Union in lifelong learning

The Bertelsmann Stiftung presents the first results for ELLI, the European Lifelong Learning Index – Germany places in the middle of the EU rankings – Weaknesses in formal education

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When it comes to lifelong learning, the Danes take top honors in Europe, while Germany stands midway down the list of 27 EU nations, mainly because of weaknesses in formal education. Those are the findings of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's new European Lifelong Learning Index (ELLI). Developed by an international team of experts over the past two years following a Canadian model, ELLI makes it possible to compare data on lifelong learning in Europe for the first time. The Index and its underlying data can be accessed as an interactive online platform at www.elli.org.

According to the ELLI results, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland join Denmark at the front of the pack. In addition to top scores for lifelong learning, these countries have the highest life satisfaction, greatest competitive capacity and least corruption. The lower end of the scale was largely occupied by European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and Greece. Germany holds tenth place, with an Index score just barely above the European average.

The Index comprises a total of 36 indicators. For the first time, ELLI also considers learning processes that take place outside traditional educational institutions, such as on the job and during leisure activities. Thus, in addition to the main index, there is a subindex for each of the four learning dimensions defined by UNESCO: The dimension "Learning to know" looks at traditional formal education, while "Learning to do" covers vocational and job-related training. The category "Learning to live together" summarizes informal social learning activities during leisure time. Finally, the dimension "Learning to be" refers to independent learning for the sake of personal development and wellbeing.

Denmark scored highest in almost every category, edged out by Sweden only in the area of continuing education on the job. By contrast, Germany primarily showed weaknesses in formal education; despite improved PISA scores, it only managed to

reach 14th place. Germany evidently also falls short compared to other European countries in the area of continuing vocational training: Both for participation rates and for financial commitment on the part of companies, the FRG ranked in the middle of the list. The results look better for nonformal and informal learning in leisure activities. Here, Germany earns points primarily for its good learning infrastructure, a key component for lifelong learning.

“Learning is not limited to the school setting,” notes Dr. Jörg Dräger, a member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board. “People also learn on the job, in clubs and political organizations, in family and leisure activities and in their communities.” He emphasizes his point: “Holistic learning is the best guarantee for wellbeing, health, social cohesion and happiness. In the future, we will have to learn more, earlier, longer and in different ways. With ELLI, we have set out to measure education and learning holistically, so that we know where we stand.”

A specific need for improvement in Germany primarily concerns higher education, according to social scientists Dr. Klaus Schömann and Dr. Christoph Hilbert of the Jacobs Center on Lifelong Learning and Institutional Development (JCLL) in Bremen, who examined and evaluated the German ELLI results for the Bertelsmann Stiftung. These experts said the number of university graduates in Germany is far too low, given that higher education underpins a society’s potential for progress.

The ELLI Index results and full details are available at www.elli.org. In addition to the Index results, the interactive platform displays more than 150 indicators of lifelong learning over time, either on maps or in traditional tables and diagrams. By autumn, the database is expected to include regional data on lifelong learning in Germany. The ELLI data pool will be updated annually.

Downloads

- ELLI Index in Brief (193 KB)
- The ELLI Index - Europe 2010 (1014 KB)
- Chart: ELLI Index (591 KB)
- Chart: Learning to Be (554 KB)
- Chart: Learning to Do (549 KB)
- Chart: Learning to Know (623 KB)
- Chart: Learning to Live Together (605 KB)