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Subject : Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on  
key competences for lifelong learning

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Delegations will find attached a revised version of the above proposal which takes account of delegations' comments made during the Committee's meeting on 9 March 2006.

In addition to two parliamentary scrutiny reservations (DK and UK), all delegations maintain general scrutiny reservations at this stage.

***Bold italics*** and ***[...]*** indicate changes to the previous document.

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
AND OF THE COUNCIL**

**on key competences for lifelong learning**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149 (4), and Article 150 (4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission<sup>1</sup>,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee<sup>2</sup>,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions<sup>3</sup>,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C [...], [...], p. [...].

<sup>2</sup> OJ C [...], [...], p. [...].

<sup>3</sup> OJ C [...], [...], p. [...].

<sup>4</sup> OJ C [...], [...], p. [...].

Whereas:

- (1) The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that a European framework should define the new basic skills as a key measure in Europe's response to globalisation and the shift to knowledge-based economies, and emphasised that people are Europe's main asset. Since then, these conclusions have been regularly restated including by the European Councils of March 2003 and of March 2005, and in the re-launched Lisbon Strategy which was approved in 2005.
- (2) The European Councils of Stockholm in 2001 and Barcelona in 2002 endorsed the concrete future objectives of European education and training systems and a work-programme (the "Education and Training 2010" work programme) to achieve them by 2010. These objectives include developing skills for the knowledge society and specific objectives for promoting language learning, developing the spirit of enterprise and the overall need to enhance the European dimension in education.
- (3) The Commission Communication on lifelong learning<sup>5</sup> and the subsequent Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning<sup>6</sup> identified "the new basic skills" as a priority, and stressed that lifelong learning must cover the preschool age to that of post-retirement. The Youth Pact which is annexed to the conclusions of the Brussels European Council of March 2005 stressed the need to encourage the development of a common set of core skills.
- (4) In the context of improving the Community's employment performance, the European Councils of March 2003 and December 2003 stressed the need to develop lifelong learning with a particular focus on active and preventive measures for the unemployed and inactive persons. This built on the report of the Employment Taskforce, which emphasised the need for people to be able to adapt to change, the importance of integrating people into the labour market, and the key role of lifelong learning.

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<sup>5</sup> Doc. 14440/01 - COM(2001) 678 final.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 1.

- (5) The report of the Council on the broader role of education adopted in November 2004 stressed that education contributes to preserving and renewing the common cultural background in society and is particularly important at a time when all Member States are challenged by the question of how to deal with increasing social and cultural diversity. Moreover, enabling people to enter and stay in working life is an important part of the role of education in strengthening social cohesion.
- (6) Five European reference levels ('benchmarks') were adopted by the Council in May 2003, demonstrating commitment to a measurable improvement in European average performance. Reference levels relating to reading literacy, early school leaving, completion of upper secondary education and participation of adults in lifelong learning are closely linked to the development of key competences.
- (7) The report adopted by the Commission in 2005 on progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training<sup>7</sup> showed that there had been no progress in reducing the percentage of low achievers in reading literacy at age 15 or in raising the completion rate for upper-secondary education. Some progress was visible in reducing early school leaving, but at current rates the 2010 European reference levels adopted by the May 2003 Council will not be achieved. Participation of adults in learning is not growing fast enough to reach the 2010 reference level and data shows that low-skilled people are less likely to participate in further training.

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<sup>7</sup> Doc. 7659/05 - SEC(2005)419.

- (8) The Framework of Actions for the Lifelong Development of Competences and Qualifications, adopted by the European social partners in March 2002, stresses the need of business to adapt their structures more and more quickly in order to remain competitive. Team-work, flattening of hierarchies, devolved responsibilities and greater need for multi-tasking are leading to the growth of learning organisations. In this context, the ability of organisations to identify competences, to mobilise and recognise them and to encourage their development for all employees represent the basis for new competitive strategies.
- (9) The Maastricht Study on Vocational Education and Training indicates a significant gap between the levels of education required by new jobs, and the levels of education achieved by the European workforce. More than one third of the European workforce (80 million persons) is low-skilled whilst it has been estimated that by 2010 almost 50% of new jobs will require tertiary level qualifications, just under 40% will require upper secondary schooling, and only about 15% will be suitable for those with basic schooling.
- (10) The Joint Council/Commission report on the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, adopted in 2004, reinforced the need to ensure that all citizens are equipped with the competences they need as part of Member States' lifelong learning strategies. To encourage and facilitate reform, the report suggests the development of common European references and principles and gives priority to the Key Competences Framework.
- (11) The need to equip young people with necessary key competences and improving educational attainment levels is an integral part of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008, approved by the June 2005 European Council. In particular, the Employment Guidelines call for adapting the education and training systems in response to new competence requirements through better identification of occupational needs and key competences as part of Member States reform programmes.

- (12) This Recommendation should contribute to the development of quality education by supporting and supplementing Member States' actions in ensuring that their initial education and training systems offer all young people the means to develop key competences to a level that equips them for further learning and adult life and that adults are able to develop and update their key competences through coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning provision. It should also provide a common European reference framework on key competences for policy makers, education and training providers, employers and learners themselves, to facilitate national reforms and exchange of information between the Member States and the Commission within the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, aiming to achieve the agreed European reference levels. Furthermore, the Recommendation should support other related policies such as employment and social policies and other policies affecting youth.
- (13) This Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity referred to in Article 5 of the Treaty insofar as its objective is to support and supplement Member States action by establishing a common reference point that encourages and facilitates national reforms and further cooperation with Member States. This Recommendation conforms to the principle of proportionality referred to in that Article because it, by leaving the implementation of the recommendation to Member States, does not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives pursued.

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

develop the provision of key competences for all as part of their lifelong learning strategies and use the "*Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework*" in the Annex hereto as a reference tool, with a view to ensuring that:

1. initial education and training offers all young people the means to develop the key competences to a level that equips them for adult life and which forms a basis for further learning and working life;
2. appropriate provision is made for those young people who, due to educational disadvantages caused by personal, social, cultural or economic circumstances, need particular support to fulfil their educational potential;
3. adults are able to develop and update the key competences throughout their lives, and that there is a particular focus on target groups identified as priorities in the national, regional and/or local contexts;
4. appropriate infrastructure for continuing education and training of adults is in place, including teachers and trainers, measures to ensure access, and support for learners that recognises the differing needs of adults;
5. coherence of adult education and training provision for individual citizens is achieved via close links to employment and social policies and other policies affecting young people and collaboration with social partners and other stakeholders;

TAKE NOTE OF THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. contribute to Member States' efforts to develop their education and training systems and to implement this Recommendation, including by using the *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework* as a reference to facilitate peer learning and the exchange of good practices and to follow up developments and report on progress through the biennial progress reports on the "Education and Training 2010" work programme;
2. use the *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework* as a reference in implementing the Community Education and Training programmes and ensure that they promote the acquisition of the key competences;
3. promote the wider use of the *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework* in related Community policies, and particularly in the implementation of employment, youth and social policy, and develop further links with social partners and other organisations working in those fields;
4. review the impact of the *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework* within the framework of the "Education and Training 2010" work programme and report, four years after the adoption of this Recommendation to the European Parliament and to the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future.

Done at Brussels,

For the European Parliament  
The President

For the Council  
The President

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# Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

## - A European Reference Framework

### Introduction

As globalisation continues to confront the European Union with new challenges, each citizen will need a wide range of key competences to adapt flexibly to a rapidly changing and highly interconnected world.

Education in its dual role - both social and economic - has a key role to play in ensuring that Europe's citizens acquire the key competences needed to enable them to adapt flexibly to such changes.

In this context, the main aims of this proposed Reference Framework are to:

- 1) identify and define the key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society;
- 2) support Member States' work on ensuring that by the end of initial education and training young people have developed the key competences to a level that equips them for adult life, and that adults are able to develop and update them throughout their lives;
- 3) provide a European level reference tool, the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning - a European Reference Framework for policy makers, education providers, employers, and learners themselves to facilitate national and European level effort towards commonly agreed objectives;

- 4) provide a framework for further action at Community level both within the Education and Training 2010 work programme and within the Community Education and Training Programmes.

This Framework sets out the eight key competences:

1. Communication in the mother tongue;
2. Communication in foreign languages;
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
4. Digital competence;
5. Learning to learn;
6. Social and civic competences;
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
8. Cultural awareness and expression.

Competences are defined here as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

They are considered as equally important, because each of them can contribute to a successful life in a knowledge-society. Many of the competences overlap and interlock: aspects essential to one domain will support competence in another. Competence in the fundamental basic skills of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT is an essential foundation for learning, and learning to learn supports all learning activities. There are a number of themes that are applied throughout the Framework: critical thinking, creativity, initiative taking, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and managing feelings constructively play a role in all eight key competences.

## Key Competences

### 1. Communication in the mother tongue<sup>8</sup>

**Definition:** 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 the full range of societal and cultural contexts — education and training, work, home and leisure.

#### Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to this competence

Communicative competence results from the acquisition of the mother tongue, which is intrinsically linked to the development of an individual's cognitive ability to interpret the world and relate to others. Communication in the mother tongue requires an individual to have **knowledge** of vocabulary, functional grammar and the functions of language. It includes an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary texts, the main features of different styles and registers of language, and the variability of language and communication in different contexts.

Individuals should have the **skills** to communicate in oral and written forms in a variety of communicative situations and to monitor and adapt their own communication to the requirements of the situation. This competence also includes the abilities to distinguish and use different types of texts, search, collect and process information, use aids, and formulate and express one's own oral and written arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context.

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<sup>8</sup> In the context of Europe's multicultural and multilingual societies, it is recognised that the mother tongue may not in all cases be an official language of the Member State, and that an ability to communicate in an official language is a pre-condition for ensuring full participation of the individual in society. *In some Member States the mother tongue may be one of several official languages.* Measures to address such cases, and apply the definition accordingly, are a matter for individual Member States in accordance with their specific needs and circumstances.

A positive **attitude** towards communication in the mother tongue or where relevant, first language involves a disposition to critical and constructive dialogue, an appreciation of aesthetic qualities and a willingness to strive for them, and an interest in interaction with others. This implies an awareness of the impact of language on others and a need to understand and use language in a positive and socially responsible manner.

## 2. Communication in foreign languages<sup>9</sup>

**Definition:** 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 thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts — education and training, work, home and leisure — according to one’s wants or needs. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding. An individual’s level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and between the different languages, and according to that individual's social and cultural background, environment and needs/interests.

### Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to this competence

Competence in foreign languages requires **knowledge** of vocabulary and functional grammar and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of language. Knowledge of societal conventions, and the cultural aspect and variability of languages is important.

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to recognise that many Europeans live in bi-lingual or multi-lingual families and communities, and that the official language of the country in which they live may not be their mother tongue. For these groups, this competence may refer to an official language, rather than to a foreign language. Their need, motivation, and social/economic reasons for developing this competence in support of their integration will differ, for instance, from those learning a foreign language for travel or work. Measures to address such cases, and apply the definition accordingly, are a matter for individual Member States in accordance with their specific needs and circumstances.

Essential **skills** consist of the ability to understand spoken messages, to initiate, sustain and conclude conversations and to read, understand and produce texts appropriate to the individual's needs. Individuals should also be able to use aids appropriately, and learn languages also informally as part of lifelong learning.

A positive **attitude** involves the appreciation of cultural diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication.

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

**Definition:**

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. Scientific competence 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. Both areas of this competence involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and responsibility as an individual citizen.

#### Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the competence

A. Necessary **knowledge** in mathematics includes a sound knowledge of numbers, measures and structures, basic operations and basic mathematical presentations, an understanding of mathematical terms and concepts, and of the questions to which mathematics can offer answers.

An individual should have the **skills** to apply basic mathematical principles and processes in everyday contexts at home and work, and to follow and assess chains of arguments. They should be able to reason mathematically, understand mathematical proof and communicate in mathematical language, and to use appropriate aids.

A positive **attitude** in mathematics is based on respect for truth and a willingness to look for logical reasons and assess their validity.

B. For science and technology, the essential **knowledge** comprises the basic principles of the natural world, fundamental scientific concepts, principles, and methods, technology and technological products and processes, as well as an understanding of the impact of science and technology on the natural world. Subsequently, these competences should enable individuals to better understand the advances, limitations and risks of scientific theories, applications and technology in societies at large (in relation to decision-making, values, moral questions, culture etc).

**Skills** include the ability to use and manipulate technological tools and machines as well as scientific data to achieve a goal or to reach a decision or conclusion, based on evidence. Individuals should also be able to recognise the essential features of scientific inquiry and have the ability to communicate the conclusions and reasoning that led to them.

Competence includes an **attitude** of critical appreciation and curiosity, an interest in ethical issues and respect for both safety and sustainability - in particular as regards scientific and technological progress in relation to oneself, family, community and global issues.

#### 4. Digital competence

**Definition:** 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.

## Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the competence

Digital competence requires a sound understanding and **knowledge** of the nature, role and opportunities of IST in everyday contexts: in personal and social life as well as at work. This includes main computer applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, information storage and management, and an understanding of the opportunities of Internet and communication via electronic media (e-mail, network tools) for leisure, information sharing and collaborative networking, learning and research. Individuals should also understand how IST can support creativity and innovation, and be aware of issues around the validity and reliability of information available and the ethical principles of in the interactive use of IST.

**Skills** needed include: the ability to search, collect and process information and use it in a critical and systematic way, assessing relevance and distinguishing real from virtual while recognising the links. Individuals should have skills to use tools to produce, present and understand complex information and the ability to access, search and use internet-based services; they should also be able use IST to support critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.

Use of IST requires a critical and reflective **attitude** towards available information and a responsible use of the interactive media; an interest in engaging in communities and networks for cultural, social and/or professional purposes also supports competence.

### 5. Learning to learn

**Definition:** ‘Learning to learn’ is the ability to pursue and persist in learning. Individuals should be able to organise their own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. Competence includes awareness of one’s learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to handle obstacles in order to learn successfully. It 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.

## Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the competence

Where learning is directed towards particular work or career goals, an individual should have **knowledge** of the competences, knowledge, skills and qualifications required. In all cases, learning to learn requires an individual to know and understand their preferred learning strategies, the strengths and weaknesses of their skills and qualifications, and to be able to search the education and training opportunities and guidance/support available to them.

Learning to learn **skills** require firstly the acquisition of the fundamental basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and ICT that are necessary for further learning. Building on this, an individual should be able to access, gain, process and assimilate new knowledge and skills. This requires effective management of one's learning, career and work patterns, and in particular the ability to persevere with learning, to concentrate on extended periods and to reflect critically on the purposes and aims of learning. Individuals should be able to dedicate time to learning autonomously and with self-discipline, but also to work collaboratively as part of the learning process, draw the benefits from a heterogeneous group, and to share what they have learnt. They should be able to evaluate their own work, and to seek advice, information and support when appropriate.

A positive **attitude** includes the motivation and confidence to pursue and succeed at learning throughout one's life. A problem-solving attitude supports both learning and an individual's ability to handle obstacles and change. The desire to apply prior learning and life experiences and the curiosity to look for opportunities to learn and apply learning in a variety of life-wide contexts are essential elements of a positive attitude.

### 6. Social and civic competences

**Definition:** These competences - personal, interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic - 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.

## Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the competence

A. Personal and social well-being requires an understanding of how individuals can ensure optimum physical and mental health, including as a resource for oneself and one's family, and **knowledge** of how a healthy lifestyle can contribute to this. For successful interpersonal and social participation it is essential to understand the codes of conduct and manners generally accepted in different societies and environments (e.g. at work). It is equally important to be aware of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, gender equality and non-discrimination, society and culture. Understanding the multi-cultural and socio-economic dimensions of European societies and how national cultural identity interacts with the European identity is essential.

**Skills** to communicate constructively in different environments, express and understand different viewpoints, negotiate with the ability to create confidence, and feel empathy are the core of this competence. Individuals should be able to cope with stress and frustration and to express it in a constructive way and should also distinguish between the personal and professional spheres.

As regards **attitudes**, the competence is based on collaboration, assertiveness and integrity. Individuals should have an interest in socio-economic development, intercultural communication, value diversity and respect others, and be prepared both to overcome personal prejudices and to compromise.

B. Civic competence is based on **knowledge** of the concepts of democracy, citizenship, and civil rights, including how they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international declarations and applied by various institutions at the local, regional, national, European and international levels. Knowledge of contemporary events, as well as the main events and trends in national history, European history - including European integration<sup>10</sup> - and world history is essential. An awareness of European diversity and cultural identity should also be developed, as well as of the aims, values and policies of social and political movements.

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<sup>10</sup> **FR:** *reservation on this reference, which it considers too succinct. It would prefer a separate paragraph along the following lines: "Knowledge of the origins of the European idea, the history of European integration, the EU institutions and how they work, and the rights, principles and values underlying the European project are also essential".*

**Cion and the Presidency, supported by NL, SE and UK, consider that the current wording is sufficient.**

**Skills** relate to the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain, display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. It involves critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in community/neighbourhood activities as well as decision-making at all levels from local to national and European level, in particular by voting.

Full respect for human rights including equality as a basis for democracy, appreciation and understanding of differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups lay the foundations for a positive **attitude**. It means displaying both a sense of belonging to one's locality, country, EU and Europe in general and (one's part of) the world, and a willingness to participate in democratic decision making at all levels. It also includes demonstrating a sense of responsibility, as well as showing understanding and respect for the shared values that are necessary to ensure community cohesion, such as respect for democratic principles. Constructive participation also involves civic activities, support for social diversity and cohesion and sustainable development, and a readiness to respect the values and privacy of others.

## 7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

**Definition:** 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. It is a foundation for the more specific skills and knowledge needed by individuals establishing social or commercial activities.

### Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the competence

Necessary **knowledge** includes the ability to identify available opportunities for personal, professional and/or business activities, including 'bigger picture' issues that provide the context in which people live and work, such as a broad understanding of the workings of the economy, and the opportunities and challenges facing an employer or organisation. Individuals should also be aware of the ethical position of enterprises, and how they can be a force for good for example through fair trade or through social enterprise.

**Skills** relate to proactive project management (involving skills such as planning, organising, managing, leadership and delegation, analysing, communicating, de-briefing and evaluating and recording), and the ability to work both as an individual and collaboratively in teams. The judgement to identify one's strengths and weaknesses, and to assess and take risks as and when warranted is essential.

An entrepreneurial **attitude** is characterised by initiative, pro-activity, independence and innovation in personal and social life, as much as at work. It also includes motivation and determination to meet objectives, whether personal goals or aims held in common with others, and/or at work.

## 8. Cultural awareness and expression

**Definition:** 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.

### Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the competence

Cultural **knowledge** includes an awareness of local, national and European cultural heritage and their place in the world. It covers a basic knowledge of major cultural works, including popular contemporary culture. It is essential to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe (and European countries), the need to preserve it and to understand the evolution of popular taste and the importance of aesthetic factors in daily life.

**Skills** relate to both appreciation and expression: self-expression through the variety of the media with individuals' innate capacities and appreciation and enjoyment of works of art and performances. Skills include also the ability to relate one's own creative and expressive points of views to the opinions of others and to identify and realise social and economic opportunities in cultural activity.

A solid understanding of one's own culture is the basis for respect and open **attitude** to diversity of cultural expression. A positive attitude also covers creativity, and the willingness to cultivate aesthetic capacity through artistic self-expression and participation in cultural life.