

## POLICY INPUT

# Adult skills - Individual Learning Accounts: a tool to improve access to training

July 2021

The European Commission (EC), through its [Work Programme 2021](#) plans to explore individual learning accounts (ILAs) as a tool to support up- and reskilling of working age adults. Individual learning accounts are “personal accounts in which training entitlements can be accumulated and spent on quality-assured training. They are one way of providing individuals with training entitlements.”<sup>1</sup> The main benefits are that it gives the individual a choice on how to make use of these entitlements, and to ensure portability between different job and employment sectors. The 2020 [European Skills Agenda](#) lists the ILA (Action 9) as one of 12 actions, along with Micro-credentials and the new Europass platform, intended “to empower everyone, whether employed, unemployed or inactive, to build skills throughout their lives”. ILA are also specifically mentioned as part of recovery efforts to overcome the aftermath of the current pandemic crisis. The implementation of the ILAs would mainly rely on Member States, which would be responsible for implementing such an initiative.

EUA’s response to the consultation welcomes the initiative and underlines the interest of the higher education sector in the ILA, and generally, in more a comprehensive European agenda for lifelong learning.

### EUA’S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

EUA welcomes the EC’s initiative of Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) as it is yet another building block for lifelong learning, which is of strategic importance in view of the post-pandemic recovery, and of Europe’s ambitious development goals, such as social inclusion, green and digital transition, and the circular economy. ILA would offer learners additional flexibility, and education providers yet another way to recognise prior learning. Connecting ILA with other instruments, such as the European Qualifications Framework, Europass, the European approach to micro-credentials, and the ENIC-NARIC centres, would help to promote the approach and ensure quality, transparency, readability, and recognition of education and training entitlements. European cross-border portability should be a central goal, also in view of the common market, and the European Education Area.

In implementing the ILAs, the EC and Member States should target a large group of potential providers and stakeholders to work with – including higher education institutions. Higher education institutions have substantial experience of working with employers and professional bodies, which have a strong interest in education informed by research and professional proficiency. Given the fast development of scientific knowledge, disruptive technologies and complex social and political processes, the demand for tertiary level LLL is likely to increase. As ever more professions and jobs require tertiary level education at the start, this has also implications for retraining, upskilling and reorientation. In the specific context of implementing ILA, Higher education institutions can share experience for building up such initiative.

EUA strongly supports the 2020 New Skills Agenda’s emphasis that “it is only by instilling a genuine culture of lifelong learning that we can ensure a competitive economy and cohesive society, and bring to life the right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning [...]”. It encourages the European Commission to invigorate its efforts to develop a comprehensive lifelong learning policy for Europe, which would embed, connect and enhance the different initiatives such as the ILA and micro-credentials, and serve as a cross-cutting policy priority that would connect education, training, employment, and social policies. This would continue the EU’s laudable initiative to promote and develop lifelong learning, commenced two decades ago, supported by the [Grundtvig Programme](#) and later by the [Lifelong Learning Programme](#).

An inclusive EU lifelong learning policy should consider all citizens, all forms and types of learning and all learning providers. In this regard, EUA recalls that the contribution of the higher education sector to lifelong learning is significant, although not always as visible or recognised as it could be. Universities provide a considerable share of lifelong learning education and training, through continued professional development and micro-credentials. They do so in diverse settings, including partnerships with each other, education providers from other sectors, industry, employers and civil society.

<sup>1</sup> [Public consultation - Adult skills - Individual Learning Accounts: a tool to improve access to training](#)