

**International ELINET Symposium 2018**  
**“Literacy in the 21st Century: Participation – Inclusion – Equity”.**

July 23-24, 2018, Cologne, Germany



**Key Note I: Kristina Cunningham**

Monday, July 23, at 14.30–15.30

**Location:** Lecture Hall Building / 1<sup>st</sup> Floor / Room C

LITERACY CHANGES LIVES.

**A comprehensive approach to literacy and language learning in multilingual European societies**

**Time:** Monday, July 23, at 14.30–15.30

**Location:** Lecture Hall Building / 1<sup>st</sup> Floor / Room C

**Speaker:**

**Kristina Cunningham,**



European Commission

DG EAC – EDUCATION YOUTH, SPORT AND CULTURE

Unit B.2 – Schools and multilingualism

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**Respondents:** **Viv Bird**, ELINET Management Board and **Dr. Christoph Gantefort**, Mercator Institute for Literacy and Language Education, Cologne

**Abstract:**

Seventy million Europeans lack adequate reading and writing skills. At the same time, an increasing number of pupils are learning the language of instruction as a foreign language in school. The increased mobility between EU countries and the rising number of third country migrants and refugees coming to the EU in recent years has contributed to greater (linguistic) diversity in European classrooms. The latest PISA report and various secondary analyses based on the PISA data show that there is a persistent gap in performance between both first and second generation immigrants and their native peers. In June 2016, the Commission adopted an **Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals**. This Plan provides tools to address the literacy skills of the young migrants. There is also evidence that the foreign language teaching in Europe in many Member States fail to yield the intended results. A lack of language skills is still an obstacle to learning mobility for young people. Against this backdrop, the Commission adopted on 14 November last year a Communication which sets out the

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vision for a **European Education Area** by 2025. Its ambition is to provide all European citizens, but especially also young people, with access to high quality education. A first step in this direction was taken through the **revised Key Competences Framework** including new, more inclusive definitions of literacy and languages. In the same context, the most recent policy initiative by the European Commission was entitled **Building a stronger Europe: new initiatives to further boost role of youth, education and culture policies**. One of the building blocks of this strategy is a proposal for a Council Recommendation on **quality in early childhood education and care** in May. This is a key element to support learning and social inclusion in particular for disadvantaged children. Another one is a proposal for a Recommendation on **a comprehensive approach to language teaching and learning in schools**. The Recommendation embraces the concept of “language-awareness in schools”, which is not new, but has taken on a new impetus in the context of increased diversity and the need to re-think language education in schools in Europe. I am going to share some of the underlying ideas with you, and discuss classroom practices that may resonate with some of the case studies we shall discover elsewhere during the Symposium.

Already in 2010, The Commission established a **literacy benchmark** of less than 15% functional illiteracy among 15-year olds as measured by PISA to be reached by 2020. In the context of **the European framework for cooperation in Education and Training (ET2020)** and especially in the context of the **Working Group on Schools**, the Commission facilitates the exchange of good practices and experiences among Member States.

Other concrete tools are the **School Education Gateway** ([www.schooleducationgateway.eu](http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu)), an electronic exchange platform for people active in the area of school education, but also support offered via **EPALE**, an online platform in the area of adult education.

**UNESCO's Global Alliance on Literacy** was launched on 8<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 2016. This presents the EU with yet another opportunity to cooperate on a global scale with other countries for raising the levels of literacy across the world.

**References:**

Web site: [Education and Training Monitor 2017](#) with country-specific fact sheets

[Action plan for the integration of third country nationals](#): COM(2016) 377 final

Web site: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on [Key Competences for lifelong learning](#) COM (2018) 24

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Press release: [Building a stronger Europe](#): new initiatives to further boost role of youth, education and culture policies IP/18/3704, 22 May 2018

Website: [Towards a European Education Area](#) – a repository of fact sheets and documents

Website: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on [High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems](#) COM(2018) 271 final

Proposal for a Council Recommendation: [A comprehensive approach to Language Teaching and Learning](#) COM (2018) 272 final

Annex to the Recommendation: [Language Awareness in Schools](#)

Commission [Staff Working Document accompanying the Recommendation](#): Scientific background and case studies SWD(2018) 174 final

Annex to the Staff Working Document: [Facts and Figures](#)

**Bio notes:**

**Kristina Cunningham** is currently the senior policy officer in charge of Multilingualism in the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in Brussels. Before this she worked as a translator for the European Commission and as a sales and marketing manager in the private sector, including eight years in Germany. She holds a Masters degree in business administration and modern languages from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and a Certificate of Political Studies from the Institute of Political Sciences in Paris, France.

Kristina's current work is focusing on the implementation of the EU objective for the development of language competences in Europe, as agreed by the Heads of State and Government: that every EU citizen should have the opportunity to learn at least two languages in addition to the language of schooling during compulsory education. In recent years, the "mother tongue+2 objective" has been open to interpretation in recognition of the fact that many young children have a different mother tongue than the main language of schooling. As a consequence, she has been closely involved in the development of strategies for making multicultural and multilingual classrooms more efficient and socially more inclusive. New actions are also envisaged to support teachers in their constantly evolving

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roles. As a result of this work, the European Commission adopted a proposed Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to language teaching and learning, in May 2018. Multilingualism is supported through EU funding programmes, enabling young people to study and work abroad, but also co-financing innovative projects and good practices aimed at promoting language skills.

The European Commission's web site on language learning policy: [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/learning-languages/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/policy/learning-languages/index_en.htm)

**Viv Bird** has worked in the education and literacy sector for most of her career including most recently seven years as the CEO of BookTrust, the UK's largest reading charity. Previously Viv held posts at the National Literacy Trust including Literacy and Social Inclusion Project Director during which time she wrote a number of influential policy and research papers.

For five years (2009-2014) Viv was Chair of EU Read, a consortium of European reading promotion organisations and, since 2013, a Board Member of the European Literacy Policy Network (ELINET). In a voluntary capacity, Viv was a school governor for 25 years, including 11 years as Chair of Governors of an extremely challenging inner city school, recognised in 2007 as one of the most improved secondary schools in England. Since her retirement in 2015, Viv continues to work with ELINET as a Board Member to promote effective literacy policies across Europe. In 2016, she was invited to join the British Council's Arts and Creative Economy Advisory Group.

**Dr. Christoph Gantefort** works at the Mercator Institute for Literacy and Language Education, Cologne, where he is responsible for pre-service teacher education in language-sensitive teaching. His current research activities comprise reading proficiency in multilingual contexts, pre service-teachers' beliefs on multilingualism as well as evaluation research on the effectiveness of multimedia tools for teacher training.