

Rethinking education

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PURPOSE: to present a new strategic framework with a view to “rethinking” education and investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes.

BACKGROUND: investment in education and training for skills development is essential to boost growth and competitiveness: skills determine **Europe's capacity to increase productivity**. In the long-term, skills can trigger innovation and growth, move production up the value chain, stimulate the concentration of higher level skills in the EU and shape the future labour market.

However, European education and training systems continue to fall short in providing the right skills for employability, and are not working adequately with business or employers to bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the working environment. These **skills mismatches are a growing concern for European industry's competitiveness**.

Despite progress over the last five years in the percentages of those qualifying from higher education,

- sustained efforts will be needed to reach the headline target of 40% of young people completing higher education;
- early school leaving remains at unacceptable levels in too many Member States;
- 73 million adults have only a low level of education;
- nearly 20% of 15 year olds lack sufficient skills in reading; and
- participation in lifelong learning is only 8.9%.

By 2020, **20% more jobs will require higher level skills** and the need to upgrade skills for employability will be one of the most pressing challenges for Member States to address the needs of the economy and focus on solutions to tackle fast-rising youth unemployment. This is why this communication emphasises **delivering the right skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions and on working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders**.

CONTENT: in its communication, the Commission identifies a limited number of strategic priorities to be addressed by Member States, alongside new EU actions to leverage national efforts. Among these, particular attention is given to combating youth unemployment.

A. Priorities for the Member States: the measures mainly seek to help the transition from learning to work and promoting work-based learning. The proposed measures may be summarised as follows:

1. Promoting excellence in vocational education and training (VET): the key actions are:

- developing, according to national circumstances, high-quality dual VET systems;
- aligning VET policies with regional/local economic development strategies namely for smart specialisation;
- enabling permeability with other educational offers;
- developing short cycle tertiary qualifications (2 years) focused on identified areas of skills shortage especially where there is growth potential such as ICT, healthcare and green skills; and
- strengthening local, national and international partnerships and networks between companies, especially SMEs, and VET providers.

2. Improving the performance of student groups with high risk of early school leaving and low basic skills: key actions include:

- putting in place high quality and accessible early childhood education and care,
- reinforcing the learning of basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and basic maths and science,
- early detection of low achievers in basic skills across all phases of schooling, and
- implementing evidence-based strategies to reduce early school leaving.

3. Strengthening the provision of transversal skills that increase employability such as entrepreneurial initiative, digital skills and foreign languages: introducing transversal skills across all curricula at all stages of education up, using innovative and student-centred pedagogical approaches, and designing assessment tools through which levels of competence can be effectively assessed and evaluated. **All young people should benefit from at least one practical entrepreneurial experience before leaving compulsory education.**

4. Reducing the number of low-skilled adults: increasing incentives for adult training by companies, validating skills and competences acquired outside formal education, and setting up access points (**one-stop shops**) that integrate different lifelong learning services, such as validation and career guidance offering tailored learning to individual learners.

5. Scaling up the use of ICT-supported learning and access to high quality Open Education Resources (OER): modernising the ICT infrastructure of schools, supporting ICT-based teaching and assessment practices, promoting the transparency of rights and obligations of users of digitalised content, establishing mechanisms to validate and recognise skills and competences acquired through OER and supporting education and training institutions to adapt their business models to the emergence of OER.

6. Revision and strengthening of the professional profile of all teaching professions including increasing teachers' digital skills.

Implementation of these reforms will not be successful without **increasing the efficiency of funding in education**. To address this challenge, the Commission calls on Member States to stimulate national debates on ways to provide sustainable funding mechanisms. Particular attention should be devoted to developing funding schemes for VET and adult learning financed via shared responsibility between public authorities, enterprises and appropriate individual contributions (e.g. sectoral training funds, training levies, etc) and aimed at attracting large companies and SMEs to provide work-based VET training.

B. European-level coordination and contributions: at EU level, focus will be given to the following actions:

1. **Enhanced country-specific focus and support to Member States** in their efforts to implement the identified priorities by monitoring progress in **each Member State in the context of the next European Semester** and feeding the results of this country examination into the preparations of the 2013 draft country-specific recommendations. In autumn 2013, enhanced monitoring will commence of the education and training benchmarks, including a new benchmark on language teaching;
2. **Improvements in work-based learning**, in particular by establishing an **EU level Alliance for Apprenticeships**. As the first step, the Commission will support a Memorandum on European cooperation in vocational education and training, bringing together a number of Member States to learn from successful approaches and schemes;
3. **Creation of a European Area for Skills and Qualifications** to promote a stronger convergence between the EU transparency and recognition;

4. **Funding Education for Growth** to strengthen commitment to a skilled and continuously trained and re-trained workforce;
5. **Analysing the impact of providing EU support** to upscaling access and use of OER and ICT, and creating a EU dimension for online education;
6. **Entrepreneurship education actions;**
7. **Partnerships between education, business and research** such as the Knowledge Alliances, the Sector Skills Alliances and the partnership actions within the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme will be promoted through the proposed Erasmus for All programme 2014-2020 and Horizon 2020.

In conclusion, the Commission indicates that it will ensure that the contribution of education and investment in skills to growth and jobs is fully reflected in the European Semester. It will use European platforms of dialogue such as the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Education and Training, the Bologna process for Higher Education and the Copenhagen process for VET as well as the funding instruments to stress the sense of urgency on the priorities identified in this communication.