



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Conclusions on Efficient and Innovative Education and Training to Invest in Skills¹ - supporting the 2014 European Semester

*EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE and SPORT Council meeting
Brussels, 24 February 2014*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

" THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,
IN THE CONTEXT OF

- Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.
- The *Europe 2020* Strategy, and
- The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 establishing a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020")².

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

- The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning³.
- The Council conclusions of 26 November 2012 on education and training in Europe 2020⁴-the contribution of education and training to economic recovery, growth and jobs.

¹ For the purposes of these conclusions, the term 'skills' is used generically and in accordance with the definition in Annex I to the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 4).

² OJ C 119, 28.05.2009, pp. 2-10.

³ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, pp. 10-18.

⁴ OJ C 393, 19.12.2012, pp. 5-7.

P R E S S

- The Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 20 December 2012⁵.
- The Council conclusions of 15 February 2013 on investing in education and training⁶, a response to *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better social-economic outcomes* and the 2013 Annual Growth Survey.
- The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013⁷ on establishing a *Youth Guarantee*.
- The Council Declaration on a *European Alliance for Apprenticeships* adopted on 15 October 2013⁸.
- Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing *Erasmus+: the Union programme for education, training youth and sport*⁹.

AND IN RESPONSE TO

- The 2014 Annual Growth Survey¹⁰, and
- The Commission communication on *Opening Up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new Technologies and Open Educational Resources*.¹¹

CONSIDERS THAT

1. Education and training have a strategic role to play in supporting the economic recovery in Europe. Although good progress has been made towards the education headline target set under the *Europe 2020 Strategy*¹², much still remains to be done to reverse the impact of the crisis and to tackle underlying structural problems.
2. Recent data suggest that these structural problems are partly linked to the lack of relevant skills and therefore present challenges to our education and training systems.

⁵ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1-15.

⁶ OJ C 64, 5.3.2013, pp. 5-8.

⁷ OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, pp. 1-6.

⁸ 14986/13.

⁹ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, pp. 50-73.

¹⁰ 15803/13 + ADD 1.

¹¹ 14116/13 + ADD 1.

¹² According to the Education and Training Monitor 2013

3. One person in five among the EU working-age population has low literacy and numeracy skills, a factor which seriously limits their employability, and despite some progress in basic skills the number of school pupils performing poorly in mathematics is still high.¹³
4. Although forecasts suggest that almost all jobs in the future will require at least basic digital skills, many school pupils still lack access to the digital technology and content needed to acquire them. A large number of adults lack digital skills altogether.

STRESSES THAT

1. There is an urgent need to address the key challenges of youth unemployment and inadequate skills levels. In addition to the essential contribution they make to fostering social cohesion and active citizenship, education and training contribute significantly to generating smart, inclusive and sustainable growth, to improving competitiveness and employability, as well to enhancing productivity and innovation.
2. Whilst acknowledging the efforts already being made in order to meet these key challenges, the EU and Member States should intensify efforts to improve education and training and continue to invest in efficient, high quality education and training.
3. The future review of the *Europe 2020* Strategy and the forthcoming stocktaking exercise of the "ET 2020" framework for European cooperation in education and training should enable the strategic role which education and training play in the European Semester to be strengthened.

WITH A VIEW TO INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE 2014 EUROPEAN SEMESTER, AGREES TO FOCUS ON:

1. Facilitating as far as possible long-term investment in the modernisation of education and training and the development of skills at both national and European level, while placing greater emphasis on the efficiency and quality of educational investment.
2. Equipping people in all age groups with better and more relevant skills, notably by strengthening lifelong learning and promoting equal opportunities for access to quality education and training, including for learners with disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. Facilitating the transition from education and training to work, notably by promoting work-based learning schemes and, where appropriate, increasing the availability of good quality traineeships or apprenticeships.

¹³ Data according to the OECD's 2013 PIAAC Survey of Adult Skills (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences) and its 2012 PISA Survey of ability in reading, maths and science among 15-year-olds (Programme for International Student Assessment).

N.B.: The right of participation of all Members States in the work of this organisation should be ensured.

4. Continuing - in cooperation with relevant stakeholders - to modernise and improve educational methods on the basis of the latest research, and making full use of the opportunities offered by digital learning, including - in accordance with national circumstances - by:
 - a) supporting educational institutions in improving their capacity - and, where appropriate, investment in ICT infrastructure - so as to exploit the potential of new technologies and digital content, including massive open online courses;
 - b) promoting more diversified learning experiences which blend face-to-face and digital learning methods;
 - c) encouraging initial teacher education and continuing professional development to explore the use of digitally supported teaching methods.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO

1. Continue efforts to improve the acquisition of key competences and to decrease the share of low-achievers at school.
2. Promote the acquisition of basic skills, as well as the adoption of re-skilling and up-skilling measures through strengthened lifelong learning, with a focus on the low-skilled.
3. Adopt effective and inclusive education and training policies which take due account of the needs of learners with disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. Encourage an evidence-based debate among a broad range of stakeholders on providing and protecting sustainable and efficient means of funding for education and training.
5. Take appropriate action in response to the key education and training-related messages in the Council Declaration on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and in the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee.
6. Explore how transparency and recognition instruments in formal education could also cater for new forms of learning, including the validation of skills acquired through quality web-based learning.
7. Support education and training institutions in exploiting the potential of new technologies and digital content as a complement to traditional educational approaches and with a view to meeting the needs of different learners, including those with disadvantaged backgrounds.
8. Support teachers and school leaders in acquiring a high level of digital skills and adopting innovative teaching practices, for example through flexible training, incentive schemes, and updated curricula for teacher education.

9. Make full use of the new generation of financial instruments, in particular the *Erasmus+* Programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds in order to address the above challenges in education and training.
10. Seek to facilitate investment in education and training as growth-friendly sectors, whilst taking into account the education and training aspects of the Europe 2020 country-specific recommendations.

INVITES MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO

1. Strengthen the contribution of education and training to the EU agenda for growth and jobs by making more efficient and effective use of investments in order to raise skills levels, improve learning outcomes and address skills shortages.
2. Encourage partnerships at national and European level between creators of educational content with a view to increasing the supply of quality Open Educational Resources and other digital educational materials in different languages, whilst paying due regard to copyright and licensing issues.
3. Further exploit the eTwinning platform and make use of the new *Open Education Europa* portal as a reference point for existing Open Educational Resources produced in the EU.
4. Follow up on the November 2013 Council policy debate by organising a summit on the challenges posed by new technologies and Open Educational Resources, particularly as regards quality assurance and the assessment and certification of skills acquired through new modes of learning.
5. Increase the added value and optimise the effectiveness of the "ET 2020" strategic framework and its underlying governance and working arrangements, notably by:
 - a) further developing cooperation between education and employment policy specialists;
 - b) ensuring that the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), including the "ET 2020" Working Groups¹⁴, effectively serve to assist in following up on identified challenges;
 - c) continuing voluntary high-level peer reviews in the context of existing OMC structures, focusing on the education and training aspects of country specific recommendations;
 - d) using the mid-term stocktaking exercise to help prepare the next draft Joint Report, with a more forward-looking focus which identifies key priority areas and concrete issues for future work;

¹⁴ Explanatory note: These working groups - first established by the Commission under the *Education and Training 2010* work programme in order to implement the Open Method of Coordination in education and training - offer a forum for the exchange of best practices in these fields. They bring together - on a voluntary basis - experts from the Member States and, in their current format, cover 6 key areas: schools, higher education, VET, adult learning, transversal skills and digital learning.

- e) optimising, reducing and simplifying education and training reporting structures so as to avoid duplication.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO

1. Compile evidence and prepare an analysis on the economic and social impact and benefits of education with a view to informing a future debate in the Council.
 2. Promote an open public debate in the context of the consultation on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications on the impact of new technologies and digital content in current practices and EU instruments and policies, including issues such as quality assurance, assessment and certification."
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