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Main Policy Lines in Education and Training

October – December 2012

I. European Union

1. Institutional context

1.1 Annual Growth Survey 2013

The annual growth survey launches the 2013 **European Semester for economic policy coordination**, which ensures Member States align their budgetary and economic policies with the Stability and Growth Pact and the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Survey should feed into national economic and budgetary decisions, which Member States will set out in Stability and Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes in April. These programmes will form the basis for the European Commissions' proposals for country-specific recommendations.

In order to maintain the slow reform momentum, the Commission recommends to focus on the **same five priorities** as in the 2012 Survey:

- Pursuing differentiated, growth-friendly **fiscal consolidation**. In this paragraph, the Commission considers that investments in education, research, innovation and energy should be prioritised and strengthened where possible, while ensuring the efficiency of such expenditure.
- Restoring **normal lending to the economy**
- Promoting **growth and competitiveness** for today and tomorrow. In this paragraph, the Commission insists on the fact that some framework conditions need to be in place at the national level and priorities include (amongst other things) raising the performance of education and training systems and overall skill levels, linking the worlds of work and education more closely together.

- **Tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis.**
In this paragraph, the Commission insists on the importance of improving employability levels, in particular of young people. This includes measures such as reducing early school-leaving and facilitate the transition from school to work by developing quality traineeships, apprenticeships and dual learning models – classroom-based education combined with hands-on experience in the workplace; developing and implementing ‘youth guarantee’ schemes whereby every young person under the age of 25 receives an offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed (can be co-financed by the European Social Fund); to improve access to lifelong learning systems throughout working life, including for older workers; to improve the connection between education and lifelong learning systems and the labour market needs. Short-cycle tertiary qualifications of two years, focused on areas where a skills shortage has been identified, as well as targeted mobility schemes, can prove effective.
- Modernising **public administration**

[Read more](#)

The Survey is accompanied by two annexes:

- [The Macroeconomic Report](#)
- [The Employment Report](#)

The Survey is underpinned by 2 reports

- [The Single Market Report](#)
- [The Alert Mechanism Report](#)

2. Education and training 2020

2.1 Rethinking education

Communication from the European Commission

20 November 2012

In this Communication the European Commission proposes actions at national level and concrete initiatives at EU level to support the modernization of education and training systems for growth and jobs.

The Communication states that the broad mission of education and training encompasses objectives such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being. While these go hand-in-hand with the need to upgrade skills for employability, against the backdrop of economic growth and a shrinking workforce due to demographic ageing, **the most pressing challenges for Member States are to address the needs of the economy and to focus on**

solutions tackling fast-rising youth unemployment. In this Communication, emphasis is being placed on

- delivering the right skills for employment
- increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions
- working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders

Building skills for the 21st century

- Transversal and basic skills

Efforts need to be concentrated on developing transversal skills (such as the ability to think critically, take initiative, problem solve and work collaboratively), particularly entrepreneurial skills (cf. the overview in the staff working document on the assessment of key competences), while the demand for STEM related skills is still high. But the first step must be that foundation or basic skills are achieved by all, although these skills are being redefined by the ongoing digital revolution. Language learning is important for jobs and needs particular attention. In a world of international exchanges, the ability to speak foreign languages is a factor for competitiveness. Faster reform is needed, with a view to reaching the target of 'mother tongue plus two'.

- Vocational skills

Increasing the quality of vocational skills requires the development of world-class VET systems. The value of VET, and notably dual training systems with a high proportion of work-based learning, in facilitating youth employment is now strongly acknowledged. VET can play a key role in addressing skills shortages, especially in sectors with growth potential such as ICT, health and care, low carbon technologies, personalised services, business services, maritime economy and green sectors. The Berlin meeting of EU Ministers of Education in December 2012 will be the first step towards new levels of cooperation in VET, supported by the European Commission "Alliance for Apprenticeships".

Stimulating open and flexible learning

- Improving learning outcomes, assessment and recognition

Achievement should be driven by learning outcomes and the power of assessment needs to be better harnessed by defining competences in terms of learning outcomes and broadening the scope of tests to broaden these. Outside school, individuals should also be able to have their skills assessed, validated and recognized, providing a skills profile for potential employers. Qualifications should open as many doors as possible and academic recognition can lead the way. A number of tools have been implemented improving transparency (EQF, ECTS, ECVET, ESCO). They were not developed in isolation from each other, but there is room for closer coherence.

- Tap into the potential of ICT and OER for learning

The digital revolution brings important opportunities for education and it is time to scale-up use of ICT in learning and teaching to exploit freely available knowledge. For definitions of OE (Open Education) and OER (Open Educational Resources) the Communication refers to UNESCO.

- Supporting Europe's teachers

Teachers face rapidly changing demands which require a new set of competences for teachers, teacher educators and education leaders. Comprehensive actions are needed to boost the attractiveness of the profession including both financial and non-financial incentives. Reforms of teaching and learning approaches are required at all levels; teachers need a stronger commitment to training. The ultimate focus should be to improve learning outcomes. The quality of teaching is a critical issue in higher education as well. The High Level Group on Modernisation of Higher Education will present recommendations in 2013.

Promoting a collaborative effort

- Funding education

Increasingly, Member States are developing models of cost-sharing between different partners (state, businesses, individuals, foundations, alumni) with public investment helping to leverage private sector match-funding. Efficient investment has to be maximised at all levels of education. Cost-sharing in VET and higher education is an option to meet that goal.

- Partnerships

Partnerships can provide a platform for targeting the right skills, if they are actively supported. To be sustainable, partnerships need to be built on clear objectives and should be a systematic part of the approach, and involve all stakeholders including representatives from teachers' organizations, student bodies and social partners. The proposed Erasmus for all funding programme will provide incentives for such partnerships.

The Communication invites Member States to push forward educational reforms to combat youth employment and to boost skills supply through the following actions:

- Promote excellence in VET
- Improve the performance of student groups with high risks of early school leaving and low basic skills
- Strengthen the provision of transversal skills that increase employability such as entrepreneurial initiative, digital skills and foreign languages
- Reduce the number of low-skilled adults
- Scale up the use of ICT supported learning and access to high quality OER
- Revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions

While the responsibility and instruments to address these issues lie with the Member States, the reforms call for a joint effort from both EU and Member States. At EU level, the focus will be on the following key actions:

- Enhanced country specific focus and support to Member States (country specific recommendations; regular peer reviews; public portal "Education and Skills Online Assessment"; a new benchmark on language teaching)
- Accelerate improvements in work-based learning (EU level alliance for partnerships)
- Create a European Area for Skills and Qualifications to promote a stronger convergence between transparency and recognition tools
- Funding education for growth
- A new European initiative on "Opening up Education"
- Entrepreneurship education
- Partnerships between education, business and research

Seven **staff working documents** provide insight and evidence on key themes:

- Education and Training Monitor 2012
This first edition of the Education and Training Monitor provides a picture of current skills supply and progress towards the Europe 2020 headline targets.
- Rethinking education: Country Analysis
- Assessment of Key Competences in Initial Education and Training
- Language Competences to Foster Employability, Mobility and Growth
- Partnerships and Flexible Pathways for Lifelong Skills Development
- Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes
- Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Growth

[Read more](#)

2.2 Education, Youth Culture and Sport Council

Brussels, 26-27 November 2012

Main results of the Education Council

- The Council took note of the state of play concerning the proposal for a regulation establishing the 'Erasmus for All' programme 2014-2020.
- The Council reached political agreement on a proposal for a recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- The Council adopted conclusions on literacy.
- The Council adopted conclusions on the contribution of education and training to economic recovery and growth
- Ministers held a public debate on how to enhance the quality, status and competence of teachers. The debate was launched by three lead speakers (Ireland, Sweden, Spain) who had particularly relevant initiatives to describe.

Most member states acknowledged that teachers were at the core of all education and training systems and were a determining factor in

educational success: teachers should continue to be a role-model for students. Improving the quality and the status of teachers was therefore a major consideration for all member states, even under the current financial constraints.

[Read more](#)

2.3 Council conclusions on literacy

26 November 2012

Literacy is one of the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the EU.

The Conclusions call on Member States to use all the relevant actions of the LLL Programme (and the future EU programme) as well as the resources of the European Social Fund, to support and disseminate innovative approaches to improving literacy attainment across the EU in order to achieve the ET 2020 target, namely fewer than 15% of low performers in reading, maths and science.

The Commission plans to establish a literacy network to exchange best practices in the member states and will launch a 'Europe loves reading' week.

[Council conclusions](#)

2.4 Conclusions on the contribution of education and training to economic recovery, growth and jobs

26 November 2012

The conclusions seek to strengthen the key role of education and training in the Europe 2020 strategy.

At national level, the conclusions emphasise the need to

- Ensure targeted and efficient investment
- Improve the quality and status of teachers
- Develop skills in line with the labour market requirements

At EU level, the conclusions encourage education and training to play a more prominent role in implementing the ET aspects in Europe 2020.

[Council conclusions](#)

2.5 Recommendation on the validation of informal and non-formal learning

26 November 2012

The Council reached political agreement on this recommendation. It invites Member States to put in place arrangements for the validation of informal and non-formal learning no later than in 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities.

Non-formal learning concerns learning that takes place through planned activities where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships). Very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations.

Informal learning is learning or skills resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. Examples are project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work; languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country; ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child).

Whilst acknowledging that the primary focus of the education system should remain on formal education and on endeavouring to ensure high quality learning outcomes for all pupils and students, the Presidency underlined that in today's situation of rising unemployment and lack of economic growth, making use of new learning opportunities and making the most of knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education could play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as providing more motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or low-qualified groups.

[Council Recommendation](#)

3. Developments in other policy domains

3.1 Council Resolution on the overview of the structured dialogue with young people on youth participation in democratic life in Europe.

26 November 2012

The Council adopted a resolution on the overview of the structured dialogue with young people on youth participation in democratic life in Europe which was the overall thematic priority for European cooperation in the youth field for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2012. The present resolution evaluates the achievements of the current work cycle, incorporates key messages from the joint recommendations, and sets priorities for the next 18-month work cycle.

[Council Resolution](#)

3.2 Council Conclusions on the participation and social inclusion of young people with the emphasis on those with a migrant background.

26 November 2012

The Conclusions underline that non-formal and informal learning has a key role to play as an instrument for supporting the social and economic inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities and in particular those with a migrant background; in this context, the work of youth workers and youth organisations with young migrants is of particular importance.

Member States are urged to develop education and training systems as well as provide teachers with the training and competences needed, that respond to the specific needs of each individual learner, including better learning support for young people with a migrant background.

[Council Conclusions](#)

4. Studies and conferences

4.1 Developing Key Competences at School in Europe. Challenges and opportunities for Policy.

Eurydice, 20 November 2012

Key competences as defined at European level comprise the following:

- Ability to readily and easily communicate in the mother tongue
- Ability to speak foreign languages
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- IT skills
- Social and civic competences
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Capacity to learn to learn
- Cultural awareness and expression

In this Eurydice report, all key competences are taken into consideration, except 'learning to learn' and 'cultural awareness and expression'. The report covers compulsory and secondary general education in 31 European countries for 2011/2012.

All countries support the development of key competences, but with different approaches (national strategies, school partnerships focusing on all key competences or on some specific ones). All European countries have reformed their curricula towards a learning outcome approach; curricula reforms in many countries have also focused on bringing this competence based approach more in line with the teaching of key competences.

The report also allows concluding that basic and transversal skills don't receive equal attention (the latter lagging behind). Testing IT, civic and entrepreneurship at school remains a challenge: only one third of the countries, for instance, uses standardised assessment of civic competences. Low student achievement in literacy, maths and science remains an issue. These results put in question not only the effectiveness of teaching and learning, but also of the education systems as a whole.

Finally, the report concludes that, while the number of MST graduates has increased, the total share in comparison to other subjects is declining.

[Read more](#)