

**Council conclusions of 26 November 2012 on education and training in Europe 2020 — the contribution of education and training to economic recovery, growth and jobs**

(2012/C 393/02)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

focused on higher education and vocational education and training as two of the key areas whose importance was emphasised during the 2012 European Semester.

IN THE CONTEXT OF:

Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;

3. The public debate on the education and training issues raised in the course of the 2012 European Semester, which was held during the European Education, Training and Youth Forum on 18-19 October 2012.

The Europe 2020 strategy, and in particular the 2012 Annual Growth Survey and the 2012 country-specific recommendations;

4. The efforts to improve empirical evidence and analytical capacity through the Education and Training Monitor.

The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 establishing a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020 ('ET2020')<sup>(1)</sup>, the primary goal of which is to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens, as well as sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue;

5. The organisation of a joint thematic review between the Education Committee and the Employment Committee on 18 April 2012.

The Council conclusions of 14 February 2011 on the role of education and training in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>(2)</sup>.

WELCOMES:

The key role played by education and training in the Europe 2020 strategy, while underlining the competence of the Member States to develop and implement reforms in the field of education and training.

HAVING REGARD TO:

The February 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training<sup>(3)</sup>, which set out steps to strengthen 'ET2020' governance and to mobilise the 'ET2020' process in support of the Europe 2020 objectives on growth and jobs.

NOTES THAT:

1. In the field of education and training, the country-specific recommendations issued by the Council on 10 July 2012 focus specifically on promoting access to good-quality pre-school and school education; reducing the number of early school leavers; facilitating the transition of young people from education and training to the labour market; improving educational outcomes and the relevance of skills to labour market needs; reinforcing vocational education and training, with a focus on work-based training and apprenticeships; modernising higher education with an emphasis on reducing drop-out rates; and improving access to education for disadvantaged groups.

AND IN THE LIGHT OF:

1. The debate on education and Europe 2020 held during the informal meeting of education ministers in Nicosia on 4-5 October 2012.

2. The pilot peer review of education and training policy responses organised on 17 September 2012, which

2. Encouraging, but uneven, progress was made between 2010 and 2011 towards the EU headline target of tertiary or equivalent attainment and early school leaving, and that continued efforts are indispensable in order for this target to be met by 2020, allowing for the fact that reforms in education and training often need time to work through.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 70, 4.3.2011, p. 1.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 70, 8.3.2012, p. 9.

AGREES THAT:

1. Even at a time of scarce financial resources, efficient and adequate investment in growth-friendly areas such as education and training is a key component of economic development and competitiveness, which in turn are essential for job creation.
2. Efficient investment in education and training can be even more important during periods of economic difficulty and at a time of high youth unemployment. Once the crisis is over, an increased supply of high quality graduates from both higher education and vocational education and training (VET) can substantially boost growth prospects, foster innovation and help avert a future crisis.
3. Competence and skills levels of both young people and adults in many areas need to be continuously and thoroughly adapted to the changing needs of the economy and the labour market. The employability of people should therefore be promoted both in education and training systems and at the workplace, as a joint public and private sector responsibility in the context of lifelong learning.
4. It is crucial to the attainment of the Europe 2020 objectives to prepare European citizens to be motivated and self-sustained learners able to contribute to promoting sustainable economic growth and social cohesion over a long period.
5. Education and training systems should aim to facilitate the transition from education to work, to strike an appropriate balance between theory and practice and, where relevant, to strengthen links between education and training and the labour market. Learning should better reflect new realities and, where appropriate, include elements of practical training which can contribute to improving the employability of students and other learners.
6. The education and training sector, including at ministerial level, should play a more prominent role both in defining common approaches and objectives relating to education and training, as well as in implementing the education and training aspects of the European Semester of Europe 2020:

(a) by holding debates in the Council on European Semester-related issues;

(b) by promoting cooperation between the Education Committee and the Employment Committee and other relevant committees.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:

1. Develop and implement, in accordance with national and regional priorities and needs, reforms aimed at tackling the challenges addressed in the country-specific recommendations in the field of education and training.
2. Target efficient investment in education and training as part of the broader strategy for economic recovery, growth and jobs, including through EU programmes and the European Structural Funds.
3. Make efforts, together with the relevant stakeholders, to improve the recruitment, professional development and overall status of school teachers, school leaders and teacher trainers, so as to increase the quality of teaching and of the learning environment, as well as to enhance the attractiveness of these professions.
4. Include more work-based elements in education and training programmes, particularly in the field of VET, including by means of traineeships and apprenticeships; set up structures of cooperation between VET institutions, enterprises, social partners and local and regional authorities; and increase the attractiveness of the VET sector, including by diversifying options within VET and providing more guidance during lower secondary education.
5. Promote flexible pathways between VET and higher education in the context of national qualifications frameworks.
6. Widen participation in higher education and VET, for instance by targeting measures towards under-represented groups, by introducing flexible learning modes and by developing, where not yet in place, professionally or vocationally oriented higher education as complementary to university education.

7. Provide better targeted student support and guidance, with a view to helping students to complete a higher education degree in the time foreseen.
8. Link education and training priorities defined within the Europe 2020 Strategy and the 'ET2020' framework to expenditure from the European Structural Funds under the current and future Multiannual Financial Framework.

## INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

1. Evaluate the recent pilot peer review exercise and present, on this basis, proposals for a discussion on possible future peer-learning events and peer reviews linked to the Europe 2020 objectives.
2. Present to the Council a draft 'ET2020' work programme, with a view to ensuring the implementation of the priority areas for the second 'ET2020' work-cycle 2012-2014 and of

the country-specific recommendations, where relevant. The work programme should specify for each priority area the planned action, timing and involvement of OMC working groups.

## INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:

1. Ensure — without prejudice to the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework — that the reform needs highlighted in the country-specific recommendations are taken into account in the choice of investment priorities and interventions programmed under the future Common Strategic Framework of the European Structural Funds.
2. Better coordinate the work of Eurydice and other relevant networks, such as Cedefop's ReferNet, with a view to analysis of Member States' education and training systems and of the reforms being carried out within the Europe 2020 process.