

2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)

New priorities for European cooperation in education and training

(2015/C 417/04)

1. CONTEXT

Europe is facing a number of urgent tasks: restoring job creation and economic recovery; achieving sustainable growth; bridging the investment gap; enhancing social cohesion; coordinating a response to the migration flow; giving priority attention to preventing radicalisation and violence. At the same time, Europe must address long-term challenges such as ageing, adjusting to the digital era and competing in the global, knowledge-based economy.

Europe's policy response under the European Commission's Political Guidelines, 'A new Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change ⁽¹⁾' marks a fresh start. There is a strong economic case for education and training as a growth-friendly sector to play a critical role under this new Agenda. Investment in human capital is money well spent. Good education and training help promote sustained economic growth, as well as sustainable development: they fuel R & D, innovation, productivity and competitiveness. Member States should make the necessary investment in all education and training systems in order to improve their effectiveness and efficiency in raising the skill and competences of the workforce, thereby allowing them to better anticipate and meet the rapidly changing needs of dynamic labour markets in an increasingly digital economy and in the context of technological, environmental and demographic change. Member States should step up efforts to improve access for all to quality lifelong learning and implement active-ageing strategies that enable longer working lives.

The tragic outbursts of violent extremism at the start of 2015 sent a stark reminder that our societies are vulnerable. Education and training have an important role in ensuring that the human and civic values we share are safeguarded and passed on to future generations, to promote freedom of thought and expression, social inclusion and respect for others, as well as to prevent and tackle discrimination in all its forms, to reinforce the teaching and acceptance of these common fundamental values and laying the foundations for more inclusive societies through education — starting from an early age ⁽²⁾. Education and training can help to prevent and tackle poverty and social exclusion, promote mutual respect and build a foundation for an open and democratic society on which active citizenship rests.

At the same time, education and training systems face the challenge of ensuring equal access to high-quality education, in particular by reaching out to the most disadvantaged and integrating people with diverse backgrounds, including adequately integrating newly arrived migrants ⁽³⁾, into the learning environment, thereby fostering upwards social convergence.

Against this background, education and training make a substantial contribution to several EU strategies and initiatives, including the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Youth Guarantee, the Youth Employment initiative, the Digital Single Market initiative, the European Agendas on Security and Migration and the Investment Plan for Europe, while the competence of Member States for their education and training systems is fully respected. ET 2020 cooperation complements national action and supports Member States through peer exchanges, mutual learning, evidence and data collection, in pursuing reforms to further improve their results.

Education and training provide individuals with the knowledge, skills and competences that enable them to grow and to influence their situations, by broadening their perspectives, equipping people favourably for their future lives, laying the foundations for active citizenship and democratic values, and promoting inclusion, equity and equality.

⁽¹⁾ Presented by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 15 July 2014.

⁽²⁾ Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, Paris, 17 March 2015.

⁽³⁾ The following shall apply wherever reference is made in this text to migrants:

This is without prejudice to the legal situation on access to education and training for different categories of migrants, as defined in the applicable international law, European Union law and national law.

The Commission's 2015 Education and Training Monitor shows that serious challenges remain:

- Across the EU, 22 % of 15-year-olds underachieve in mathematics. Among pupils with low socioeconomic status, this is a worrying 36.6 %. In addition, 18 % of the EU's 15-year-olds score poorly in reading and 17 % underachieve in science. Underachievement in these study fields is about 60 % more prevalent amongst boys than it is amongst girls ⁽⁴⁾;
- One in four adults in Europe is caught in a low-skills trap — one that limits access to the labour market while simultaneously closing avenues to further education or training. Only 4.4 % of the 66 million adults with at best lower secondary education attainment participate in adult learning ⁽⁵⁾;
- Early school leaving ⁽⁶⁾ now stands at 11.1 %. While good progress has been made towards the common Europe 2020 headline target, there are still more than 4.4 million early school leavers across Europe, and about 60 % of these are either inactive or unemployed, which means higher risks of social exclusion and lower civic engagement;
- Higher education attainment ⁽⁷⁾ continues to improve and now stands at 37.9 %. Again, good progress has been made towards the common Europe 2020 headline target, but the employability of graduates remains stagnant across the EU.

The comprehensive mid-term stocktaking of the ET 2020 strategic framework carried out in 2014, involving Member States and key stakeholders, and providing the basis for this Report, led to three main policy conclusions:

- The value of an integrated framework covering education and training at all levels was confirmed. Today's need for flexibility and permeability between learning experiences requires policy coherence from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning, thereby upholding the principle of lifelong learning.
- The ET 2020's four strategic objectives (and current EU benchmarks) remain valid as they were formulated in a comprehensive and forward-looking manner in the ET 2020 Council conclusions of 2009, providing a solid basis for ET 2020 activities up to 2020. However, the policy focus needs to be re-calibrated to include both the pressing economic and employment challenges and the role of education in promoting equity and inclusion and in imparting common European values, intercultural competences and active citizenship.
- ET 2020 is an important contributor to the overall EU agenda for jobs, growth and investment, including the European Semester. In this respect, the evidence base and mutual learning around reform challenges could be strengthened as well as the country-specific relevance of the framework, where appropriate.

Against the challenges and policy conclusions set out above, and in order to better align ET 2020 with the EU's political term and priorities, this Joint Report proposes to steer European cooperation under this framework up to 2020, thus increasing its work cycle from 3 to 5 years.

2. MAIN CHALLENGES DETERMINING THE CHOICE OF FUTURE PRIORITIES

On the basis of the stocktaking, and whilst recognising differences between Member States, this chapter presents the main developments and challenges in European education and training which have led to the identification of the new **priority areas** and **concrete issues** for further work up to 2020.

The new *priority areas* are:

- Relevant and high-quality knowledge, skills and competences developed throughout lifelong learning, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being;
- Inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences;

⁽⁴⁾ OECD's 2012 PISA results: Excellence through equity.

⁽⁵⁾ The Survey of Adult Skills: Implications for education and training policies in Europe, European Commission (2013).

⁽⁶⁾ The share of the population aged 18 to 24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training.

⁽⁷⁾ The percentage of those aged 30 to 34 who have successfully completed tertiary level education (Eurostat).

- Open and innovative education and training, including by fully embracing the digital era;
- Strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders and other educational staff;
- Transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning and labour mobility;
- Sustainable investment, quality and efficiency of education and training systems.

These priority areas, and the concrete issues related to them, are outlined in the Annex hereto.

2.1. *The quality and relevance of learning outcomes are key to the development of skills and competences*

Europe's low levels of basic knowledge and skills hamper economic progress and severely limit individuals in their professional, social and personal fulfilment. To enhance employability, innovation and active citizenship, and building on the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, basic skills must go hand in hand with other key competences and attitudes: creativity, entrepreneurship and a sense of initiative, digital competences ⁽⁸⁾ competence in foreign languages, critical thinking including through e-literacy and media literacy, and skills which reflect growing needs, such as those in the green economy and in the digital and health sectors.

The quality of learning outcomes to be stimulated in a lifetime perspective. While a majority of Member States have put in place comprehensive lifelong learning strategies, all countries should develop such strategies and ensure the permeability between various forms and levels of learning and from education and training to work. This requires continued efforts of coordination and partnership between different learning sectors and between education institutions and relevant stakeholders.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is the starting point and one of the most efficient means of raising proficiency in key competences, but it faces a double challenge of broadening access and enhancing quality. The provision of services for children under 3 years is particularly problematic in some countries. As suggested in the Quality Framework for ECEC developed by experts of the Member States during the previous work cycle, key issues for further work could include the improvement of access, focusing on the disadvantaged, the professionalisation of staff and efficient governance, curricula, funding and monitoring systems.

Measures aimed at reducing early school leaving have been introduced by all Member States, but do not always add up to comprehensive strategies, as required by the 2011 Council Recommendation ⁽⁹⁾, or to equivalent evidence-based policies. A successful response requires long-term commitment and cross-sectoral cooperation, focusing on the right mix of prevention, early intervention and compensation measures. School-based early school leaving policies should include collaborative approaches, the active involvement of parents, partnerships with external stakeholders and the community, measures to support the well-being of pupils and high-quality guidance and counselling, ensuring that each pupil has an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from high-quality education and enabling all learners to reach their full potential.

Higher education systems should boost the knowledge economy and respond to society's needs. Higher education needs to respond effectively to the demands of a changing society and labour market, raising Europe's skills and human capital, and strengthening its contribution to economic growth. To achieve this, it should ensure that modernisation focuses on synergies between education, research, innovation and employment, creating links between higher education institutions and the local environment and regions, implementing innovative approaches to improving the relevance of curricula, including using information and communication technologies (ICT), improving transitions to employment and strengthening international collaboration. While reducing drop-out rates and increasing graduation rates remain a challenge for many Member States, especially among disadvantaged groups, the need to ensure that all forms of higher education provide students with relevant high-level knowledge, skills and competences that prepare them for their future careers is a priority. Higher education must also help to prepare students for active citizenship based on an open attitude and critical thinking, as well as support personal development, while playing its full role in transmitting and producing knowledge.

⁽⁸⁾ Learning and acquiring digital competences go beyond pure ICT skills and involve the safe, collaborative and creative use of ICT, including coding.

⁽⁹⁾ The United Kingdom voted against this Recommendation.

Vocational education and training play a key role in developing the relevant skills. Graduates from vocational education and training already show good employment rates in most Member States. This is also thanks to measures aimed at improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training that were taken in the period 2011-2014 in order to implement the deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué under the Copenhagen process. Further reforms should follow, along the lines of the medium-term deliverables defined in the Riga conclusions of 22 June 2015 (see Annex). Relevant skills development should be pursued by further promoting all forms of work-based learning, such as traineeships, apprenticeships and dual schemes for vocational education and training, reinforcing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, developing further partnerships with all stakeholders at local, regional and national levels and strengthening the anticipation of skills needs. At the same time, the initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors should be strengthened, including by means of placements in business and industry to keep abreast of developments in the field.

Adult learning as the basis for up-skilling, re-skilling, active citizenship and social cohesion. Recent surveys ⁽¹⁰⁾ showing the low levels of basic skills in adults, together with the impact of globalisation on skills needs and high unemployment rates, make it necessary to reinforce implementation of the Renewed European Agenda for adult learning. Priorities should include more effective governance, significant increases in supply and take-up, more flexible provision, broader access, closer monitoring and better quality assurance (see Annex). Adult learning provides recently arrived migrants and people with a migrant background with an opportunity for further education or re-training and increases the opportunities for these individuals to establish themselves in the labour market and integrate into society.

2.2. Education and training are essential for promoting social cohesion, equality, non-discrimination and civic competences

Inequality is at its highest level in 30 years in most European and OECD countries and has a negative impact on educational outcomes, since education systems tend to reproduce existing patterns of socioeconomic status. Breaking the intergenerational cycle of low qualifications must therefore be a priority. A majority of Member States have taken measures to improve access to education for disadvantaged learners. Nevertheless, a significant educational gap persists and access to good quality education and training, starting with early childhood education and care, remains a challenge in several parts of the EU. Effective action to respond to diversity in all its forms and to provide inclusive education and training for all learners is needed, focusing on disadvantaged groups such as learners with special needs, newly arrived migrants, people with a migrant background and Roma. The Youth Guarantee should be fully mobilised (i.e. job market placements, apprenticeships and second-chance education and training).

Gender gaps in education and training, which are also based on the continuation of gender stereotypes, must be tackled and gender differences in educational choices addressed. Bullying, harassment and violence in the learning environment, including gender-related, cannot be tolerated. Learning institutions and teachers, trainers, school leaders and other educational staff must be equipped and supported for learners to experience inclusion, equality, equity, non-discrimination and democratic citizenship in their learning environments. Open learning environments, such as public libraries, open adult education centres and open universities, should be empowered as a means of promoting social inclusion.

The Paris Declaration of Education Ministers of 17 March 2015 called for action at all levels to reinforce the role of education in promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination, strengthening social cohesion, and helping young people become responsible, open-minded and active members of our diverse and inclusive society ⁽¹¹⁾. Education is important to prevent and tackle marginalisation and radicalisation. The follow-up to the Declaration is a key priority in the new work cycle. It will take the form of joint analysis, peer learning, meetings, dissemination of good practices and concrete measures underpinned by funding from the Erasmus+ programme, in line with the four areas identified in the Declaration: (i) ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination as well as active citizenship (ii) enhancing critical thinking and media literacy (iii) fostering the education of

⁽¹⁰⁾ See in particular the OECD's Survey of Adult Skills, conducted under the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

⁽¹¹⁾ Non-formal education is important to promote the social and democratic participation of young people, which is a priority under the EU cooperation framework in the field of youth (2015 EU Youth Report).

disadvantaged children and young people and (iv) promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.

The importance of the above-mentioned areas of action is reinforced by the current inflow of migrants into Europe. The arrival of people with diverse backgrounds is creating a challenge for the education and training sector and its stakeholders throughout Europe. For those migrants that stay in our countries, their integration into education and training is a crucial step towards their social inclusion, employability, professional and personal fulfilment, and active citizenship. In this context, facilitating the effective acquisition of the language(s) of the host country is a first priority. Furthermore, the successful integration of migrants also depends on the development of intercultural skills among teachers, trainers, school leaders, other members of educational staff, learners and parents so as to ensure a greater readiness for multicultural diversity in the learning environment. The European dimension of migration underlines the pertinence of fully supporting the Member States in their integration actions, e.g. through including joint analysis, peer learning, conferences and the dissemination of good practices.

2.3. *Relevant and high-quality learning requires ...*

A more active use of innovative pedagogies and tools for developing digital competences: Education and training — at all levels — can benefit from the introduction of well-tested innovative pedagogical practices and didactic materials that have demonstrated their capacity to contribute in a concrete manner to inclusive, engaged learning for diverse learners. Several Member States report initiatives to increase teachers' and learners' digital competences and one third have introduced national strategies for the digitalisation of education. Nevertheless, huge challenges remain. Societies are becoming increasingly digital, thus boosting demand for digital competences. Education and training must address this need, which requires investment in infrastructure, organisational change, digital devices and digital competences of teachers, trainers, school leaders and other members of educational staff, as well as the creation of digital (and open) educational resources and high-quality educational software. Education and training should reap the benefits of new ICT developments and adopt innovative and active pedagogies, based on participatory and project-based methods. Open learning environments — such as public libraries, open adult education centres and open universities — can help collaboration between educational sectors, including for disadvantaged learners.

Strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders and other members of educational staff, who play a key role in ensuring the success of learners and in implementing education policy: Many Member States report measures for enhancing teacher training and emphasise the initial education and continuing professional development of teachers and trainers should be fit for purpose, combining subject matter, pedagogy and practice. Equipping the relevant staff at all levels and in all sectors of education and training with strong pedagogical skills and competences, based on solid research and practice, remains a priority. They should be trained to deal with learners' individual needs and growing diversity in terms of their social, cultural, economic and geographic backgrounds, to prevent early school leaving and to use innovative pedagogies and ICT tools in an optimal manner, while enjoying 'induction' support early in their careers.

Staff shortages increasingly hinder quality instruction in many countries, while interest in teaching careers is largely in decline. Therefore Member States should take measures to increase the attractiveness and status of the teaching profession⁽¹²⁾. Comprehensive long-term policies are required to make sure that the most suitable candidates are selected, with diverse backgrounds and experience, and that teachers have attractive opportunities for career development, also with a view to offsetting the existing strong gender bias.

Facilitating learning mobility at all levels: The first Mobility Scoreboard (2014), produced in follow-up to the 2011 Council Recommendation on learning mobility, reveals that the environment for learning mobility varies greatly between Member States, with significant barriers remaining in terms of information, student support and recognition. Actions on transparency, quality assurance and the validation and recognition of skills and qualifications have to be tracked and pursued. Better data are needed for evidence monitoring on mobility.

Supporting internationalisation in higher education and vocational education and training will remain a priority. This could include policy cooperation with other regions of the world on quality assurance and promoting learning outcomes, the development of strategic partnerships and joint courses, and the promotion of mobility of students, staff and researchers, as well as work towards facilitating the use of qualifications acquired outside the EU.

⁽¹²⁾ Policy Measures to Improve the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession in Europe, European Commission (2013).

Strengthened and simplified EU transparency and recognition tools, and greater synergy between these: Transparency and recognition tools are essential for mobility, employability and lifelong learning. Some of them, such as Europass, are used widely. To ensure greater transparency, most Member States have developed National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and have referenced these to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Several Member States have implemented the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Further work should promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning, as well as facilitate the transparency and the comparability of qualifications across Europe. With regard to newly arrived migrants, existing transparency instruments could also help a better understanding of foreign qualifications in the EU, and vice versa. Adequate recognition and validation can support the uptake of open and innovative learning practices, including those using digital technology.

Further work should also focus on implementing the EQF and NQFs more effectively and on further developing the EQF in order to enhance the transparency and comparability of qualifications. Use of the EQF and NQFs can support existing recognition practices and thus make the process of recognition easier.

Particular attention should also be given, after a preliminary impact assessment, to simplifying and rationalising existing EU instruments such as tools, portals and other services on skills and qualifications aimed at the wider public with a view to strengthening outreach.

Filling the investment gap: Effective investment in quality education and training is a source of sustainable growth. Yet since the crisis, public budgets have remained tight and several Member States have cut their education and training expenditure in real terms. This suggests the need to support Member States in designing reforms that deliver quality education and training more efficiently, within a broad societal context. The Investment Plan for Europe, Erasmus+, the European Structural and Investment Funds, including the Youth Employment Initiative, and Horizon 2020, can help to stimulate investments and support ET 2020 policy priorities, whilst ensuring strong links with policies.

3. GOVERNANCE AND WORKING METHODS

Since the 2012 Joint Report the governance of ET 2020 has improved, in particular by strengthening evidence building (the Education and Training Monitor) and the operational character of Working Groups, and by developing regular platforms for exchanges between key stakeholders such as the Education, Training and Youth Forum. The stocktaking indicates a consensus on the following approach for the next work cycle:

- **Strong analytical evidence and progress monitoring** are essential for the effectiveness of the ET 2020 framework, and will be carried out in cooperation with Eurostat, the Eurydice network, Cedefop, the OECD and other organisations.
- **Streamlining and rationalising reporting** within the ET 2020 framework remain a priority and will be aided by the extension of the work cycle to 5 years. Optimal use will be made of the analytical and up-to-date facts and figures provided, for example, through the Eurydice network and Cedefop (ReferNet). In addition, in the country-specific chapters of the Education and Training Monitor, up-to-date national data will also be taken into account, if methodologically sound.
- **Stronger links between education, business and research, as well as the involvement of social partners and civil society**, will strengthen the impact of ET 2020 and the relevance of learning systems to increase Europe's innovation capacity. Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances under Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology under Horizon 2020 are trend-setting in this respect. Engagement with stakeholders will also be stimulated through the Education, Training and Youth Forum, the European University-Business Forum, the VET-Business Forum and Thematic Fora in Member States. Cooperation with European civil society and European social partners will be pursued in order to allow an optimal use of their expertise and outreach capacity.

The ET 2020 tools have proved their worth, but have not always had an effective impact at national level, notably due to a lack of synchronisation of activities, shortcomings in dissemination and low national awareness of the usefulness of results. The ET 2020 toolbox will be strengthened:

- To improve the transparency and coherence of ET 2020 activities, the Commission — in cooperation with the Member States (including the trio of Council Presidencies) — will prepare an **ET 2020 indicative rolling Work Plan**, integrating and providing a clear overview of key activities and peer learning events planned for the informal meetings of senior officials, i.e. during the meetings of the Directors General for schools, for vocational education and training and for higher education ('DG meetings') and the High-Level Group on Education and Training, the ET 2020 Working Groups, the EQF Advisory Group and the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.
- As of 2016 a new generation of **Working Groups** ⁽¹³⁾ will work on **ET 2020 concrete issues** listed in the Annex. Their mandates will be proposed by the Commission and adjusted in the light of comments expressed by the Member States, in particular through the Education Committee. The Groups will report regularly to the relevant informal groups of senior officials (i.e. the DG meetings and the High-Level Group on Education and Training) which provide steering, and to the Education Committee which brings relevant outputs to the attention of the Council. Innovative working methods will be encouraged and the outputs of the Groups will be better disseminated so as to enable real knowledge-sharing, as well as to facilitate follow-up work.
- **ET 2020 peer learning activities**, usually conducted within Working Groups, will be strengthened and enable Member States sharing similar policy challenges to work in clusters. **Peer reviews**, organised in implementation of the 2012 Joint Report on a voluntary basis and focusing on country-specific challenges, have proved useful in the context of the informal DG meetings but require more preparation and interactive dialogue. Tailor-made **peer counselling** can also be used to support a particular national reform agenda ⁽¹⁴⁾.
- **The dissemination of good practices** and lessons learned, using international evidence when relevant, will be enhanced through thematic events, policy learning exchanges and any arrangement for knowledge transfer and exchanges on what works in education. To facilitate an effective take-up of certain key ET 2020 outputs by education and training stakeholders, special attention will be given to the dissemination of the essential messages in the EU's official languages, as resources allow. In addition, dissemination arrangements will be included in the mandates of the ET 2020 Working Groups and will be reflected in the rolling Work Plan.
- The **Education and Training Monitor**, synchronised with the European Semester and providing up-to-date thematic and country-specific evidence, will be used systematically to inform policy debates at Council level, as well as the European Parliament, in discussions on education challenges and reforms.
- Full use will be made of the potential of the **Erasmus+ programme** to increase the impact of the ET 2020 tools, including by anchoring the preparation for policy experimentations in the Working Groups and using evidence gathered through excellent projects.
- While positive steps have been taken to promote cooperation on education and training with the Employment Committee in follow-up to the 2012 Joint Report, there is still scope to explore ways of improving and better structuring this relationship, for instance by encouraging more evidence-based debate on human capital issues in line with the Council (EPSCO) conclusions of 9 March 2015.
- Enhance cooperation both within the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council and with other Council formations.

⁽¹³⁾ 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.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Peer counselling is an instrument which brings together, on a voluntary and transparent basis, professional peers from a small number of national administrations to provide external advice to a country in the process of a significant policy development. It is intended to go beyond information-sharing and provide a forum for finding solutions to national challenges in a participatory workshop.

ANNEX

PRIORITY AREAS FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The mid-term stocktaking confirmed the relevance of the four ET 2020 **strategic objectives** set by the Council in 2009, namely:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Within these strategic objectives, the stocktaking exercise highlighted the common objective of Member States to streamline the current priority areas for action. The table below proposes a reduction from 13 to 6 **priority areas**, each of which can contribute to one or more strategic objectives for the period up to 2020, fully coherent with and contributing to the EU's overall political priorities.

In the table below, the priority areas are declined into **concrete issues**, in response to the Council's request for a more concrete indication of topics for future work. These areas will be followed-up through the ET 2020 working methods and its tool box; they (i) reflect a common challenge for the Member States; and (ii) show the added value of tackling them at European level. The *concrete issues* will form the basis for the mandates of the next generation of ET 2020 Working Groups.

Member States will select, in accordance with national priorities, those areas and issues for work and cooperation in which they wish to participate.

Priority areas	Concrete issues
<p>1 Relevant and high-quality knowledge, skills and competences developed throughout lifelong learning, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being</p>	<p>i. Enhancing targeted policy action to reduce low achievement in basic skills across Europe, covering language, literacy, mathematics, science and digital literacy</p> <p>ii. Strengthening the development of transversal skills and key competences, in line with the Reference Framework on Key Competences for lifelong learning, in particular digital, entrepreneurship and language competences</p> <p>iii. Relaunching and continuing lifelong learning strategies and addressing the transition phases within education and training, while promoting, through high-quality guidance, transitions to and between vocational education and training, higher education and adult learning, including non-formal and informal learning, and from education and training to work</p> <p>iv. Fostering generalised, equitable access to affordable high-quality early childhood education and care, especially for the disadvantaged, and taking forward the Quality Framework in this area</p> <p>v. Reducing early school leaving by supporting school-based strategies with an overall inclusive learner-centred vision of education and 'second-chance' opportunities, emphasising effective learning environments and pedagogies</p> <p>vi. Promoting the relevance of higher education to the labour market and society, including through better intelligence and anticipation about labour market needs and outcomes, e.g. tracking the career of graduates, encouraging the development of curricula, more work-based learning and enhanced cooperation between institutions and employers</p>

	Priority areas	Concrete issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vii. Implementing the Riga medium-term deliverables in VET (see details at the end of the text), while reinforcing the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and strengthening the anticipation of skills needs for the labour market viii. Implementing the Renewed European Agenda for adult learning (see details at the end of the text)
2	Inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Addressing the increasing diversity of learners and enhancing access to quality and inclusive mainstream education and training for all learners, including disadvantaged groups, such as learners with special needs, newly arrived migrants, people with a migrant background and Roma, while tackling discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying (including cyber-bullying), violence and stereotypes ii. Addressing the issue of gender gaps in education and training, and unequal opportunities for women and men, and promoting more gender-balanced educational choices iii. Facilitating the effective acquisition of the language(s) of instruction and employment by migrants through formal and non-formal learning iv. Promoting civic, intercultural, and social competences, mutual understanding and respect, and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels of education and training v. Enhancing critical thinking, along with cyber and media literacy
3	Open and innovative education and training, including by fully embracing the digital era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Further exploring the potential of innovative and active pedagogies such as inter-disciplinary teaching and collaborative methods, to enhance the development of relevant and high-level skills and competences, while fostering inclusive education, including for disadvantaged learners and learners with disabilities ii. Fostering cooperation by stimulating the engagement of learners, teachers, trainers, school leaders and other members of educational staff, parents and the broader local community such as civil society groups, social partners and business iii. Increasing synergies between education, research and innovation activities, with a sustainable growth perspective, building on developments in higher education, with a new focus on vocational education and training and schools iv. Promoting the use of ICT with a view to increasing the quality and relevance of education at all levels v. Boosting availability and quality of open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education levels, in cooperation with European open source communities vi. Addressing the development of digital competences at all levels of learning, including non-formal and informal, in response to the digital revolution
4	Strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders and other educational staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Strengthening the recruitment, selection and induction of the best and most suitable candidates for the teaching profession ii. Raising the attractiveness, for both genders, and the status of the teaching profession

	Priority areas	Concrete issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Supporting initial education and continuing professional development at all levels, especially to deal with the increased diversity of learners, early school leaving, work based learning, digital competences and innovative pedagogies, including through EU tools such as eTwinning, the School Education Gateway and the ePlatform for adult learning in Europe (EPALE) iv. Supporting the promotion of excellence in teaching at all levels, in the design of teacher education programmes and in learning organisation and incentive structures, as well as exploring new ways to assess the quality of teacher training
5	Transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning and labour mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Fostering transparency, quality assurance, validation and thereby recognition of skills and/or qualifications, including those acquired through digital, online and open learning resources, as well as non-formal and informal learning ii. Simplifying and rationalising the transparency, documentation, validation and recognition tools that involve direct outreach to learners, workers and employers, and further implementing the EQF and NQFs iii. Supporting the mobility of pupils, apprentices, students, teachers, members of educational staff and researchers iv. Developing strategic partnerships and joint courses, in particular through increasing internationalisation of higher education and vocational education and training
6	Sustainable investment, quality and efficiency of education and training systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Exploring the potential of the Investment Plan for Europe in the area of education and training, including by promoting funding models attracting private actors and capital ii. Encouraging Member States to use evidence-based policy-making, including the evaluation and assessment of education and training systems, to monitor policies and design reforms that deliver quality education more efficiently iii. Encouraging innovative ways to ensure sustainable investment in education and training, examining forms of performance-based funding and cost-sharing, where appropriate

SPECIFIC PRIORITIES FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND FOR ADULT LEARNING UP TO 2020

The sectoral agendas for vocational education and training (the Copenhagen-Bruges process) and for adult learning require a more detailed identification — and endorsement via this Joint Report — of the deliverables/priorities for the period up to 2020.

I. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)

The Riga conclusions of 22 June 2015 proposed the following new set of medium-term deliverables ⁽¹⁾ in the field of VET for the period 2015-2020:

— Promoting **work-based learning** in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship.

⁽¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

- Further developing **quality assurance** mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET ⁽²⁾ recommendation and, as part of quality assurance systems, establishing continuous **information and feed back loops to initial VET (I-VET) and continuing VET (C-VET) ⁽³⁾ systems based on learning outcomes.**
- Enhancing **access to VET and qualifications for all** through more flexible and permeable systems, notably by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- Further strengthening **key competences** in VET curricula and providing more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through I-VET and C-VET.
- Introducing systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, the **initial and continuous professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors** in both school and work-based settings.

II. ADULT LEARNING

The Renewed European Agenda for adult learning ⁽⁴⁾ which the Council adopted in 2011 outlined a number of priority areas for the period 2012-2014, but set these in a longer term perspective aligned with the four ET 2020 strategic objectives. Specific priorities on which the Member States, with the support of the European Commission, should concentrate up to 2020 in order to achieve the longer term vision of the Agenda, are as follows:

- **Governance:** ensuring the coherence of adult learning with other policy areas, improving coordination, effectiveness and relevance to the needs of society, the economy and the environment; increasing, where appropriate, both private and public investment.
- **Supply and take up:** significantly increasing the supply of high-quality adult learning provision, especially in literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and increasing take-up through effective outreach, guidance and motivation strategies which target the groups most in need.
- **Flexibility and access:** widening access by increasing the availability of workplace-based learning and making effective use of ICT; putting in place procedures to identify and assess the skills of low qualified adults, and providing sufficient second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised EQF qualification for those without EQF level 4 qualifications.
- **Quality:** improving quality assurance, including monitoring and impact assessment, improving initial and continuing education of adult educators, and collecting the necessary data on needs to effectively target and design provision.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 155, 8.7.2009.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 324, 1.12.2010, p. 5.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 1.