

EFEE

THE EUROPEAN
FEDERATION OF
EDUCATION
EMPLOYERS



Ms Ana-Carla Pereira
Head of Unit
DG Employment, Social Affairs
And Inclusion
Dir. E Skills and Qualifications

Brussels, 9 February 2016

Subject: Further input by EFEE and CEEP to the consultation on “A new skills agenda for Europe”

Dear Ms Ana-Carla Pereira,

With this letter the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) and the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP) are pleased to provide further input to the social partners consultation on “A new skills agenda for Europe”. In particular, we wish to contribute to the three main priorities on ensuring higher and more relevant skills for all, promoting better visibility and use of available skills, and reaching a better understanding of skills needs and trends in the labour market, by elaborating our views and by providing practical examples of what social partners could do.

EFEE and CEEP very much welcome this initiative of the European Commission, since there is a strong and urgent need to **focus on ensuring higher and more relevant skills for all European citizen**. The economic downturn and high unemployment rates have demonstrated painfully the gap that exists in some European countries between the world of work and the world of education. Graduates are unable to find work, while at the same time vacancies remain unfilled and companies are unable to find suitable candidates with relevant skills and competences.

In a world where change is constant, neither education and training providers nor enterprises can predict accurately what specific skills and competences will be required in the workplaces of the future, as we state in EFEE and CEEP’s Joint Recommendations on “[Matching education with the needs of the public services of the future](#)”. Consequently, the emphasis should be on the **provision of key competences** and the inculcation of attitudes that provide

workers with the capacity to go on learning for the whole of their lives so that they may be able to adapt effectively to the changes that will affect their lives.

Furthermore there is indeed a need to develop **stronger cooperation between the world of work and the world of education and training**. Apprenticeships, internships and work-based learning are effective means to improving the transition between both worlds. Moreover, fostering local and regional partnerships between schools, businesses and local/regional governments should be a priority at the national level as it may contribute to ensuring young people acquire the skills and dispositions relevant to gaining and retaining employment.

In the Netherlands, for example, a regional investment fund for vocational education and training (VET) has been set up to promote public-private partnerships between VET schools, colleges, local businesses and local/regional governments in order to make education more innovative and more closely linked to the labour market.¹ In the UK, as we have seen during EFEE's Peer Learning Activity hosted by the Local Government Association of the UK², Councils have set up several initiatives to support youth transition into work and learning, including developing and advising on vocational routes, particular apprenticeships, building long-term relationships with employers that enable them to have a genuine influence on the education and skills system, and supporting the creation of learning and job opportunities locally.³ In order to better link the world of work and the world of education it is essential that measures are taken at the most appropriate level.

However it is important to underline that education must not be seen only in the context of skills for employability. Education must also provide learners with the skills and dispositions to be critical thinkers and to live fulfilled, sustainable and constructive lives – in the family, in the community and as active citizens in an inclusive democratic society. In this regard, **education systems need to have a holistic rather than a narrow and exclusively vocational focus**. This is particularly important nowadays in the light of the Paris Declaration⁴, and our common wish and duty to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education and training.

In the EC's background paper much emphasis is placed on education and training for the labour market and employability. However, in order to raise the profile and relevance of VET, the European Commission would need to further emphasise the holistic education dimension of VET and thus the requirement for all VET programmes to adequately comprehend the **key competences for lifelong learning** in order to maximise learner engagement and ensure that learners acquire the capacity to continuously adapt to change.

We agree that, in order to provide learners with the competences they need - whether for life or for work - in our fast-changing society, **schools need to be modern and offer innovative**

¹ <http://www.investeringsfondsmbo.nl/>

² EFEE Peer Learning Activity to UK on "Promoting transition from education to employment", 2-3 September 2015, hosted by Local Government Association of the UK (EFEE member); outcomes are available [here](#)

³ Local Governmentsociation, "Councils supporting youth transitions into work and learning", April 2014

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf

learning environments. As stated in EFEE’s position paper on “[Opening Up Education](#)” (2013), schools and universities should provide a professional working environment for our teachers, professors and researchers and an interesting learning community for our pupils and students, to foster a culture of openness and continuous learning for all.

We reaffirm that open learning environments require the **leaders of educational institutions to play an active role** in developing a strategic vision for their institutions so that they may become connected learning communities that stimulate their staffs to strive continuously for innovation in teaching and learning.

For example, during EFEE’s Peer Learning Activity in Flanders on “Excellence and innovation in education”⁵, we saw the important role school leaders play in creating an **innovative working and learning climate at school**. Within the framework of GO! Campus Hoboken in Antwerp, three schools (one primary⁶, one secondary⁷ and one adult education school⁸) work closely together to provide for open and intergenerational education. Youngsters and adults are offered the opportunity to gain work-experience within the campus (for example at the primary and secondary school) and young kids learn skills and competences from the older students. Everyone works together in the so-called “open learning centre”. This open learning centre is also open for youngsters and adults living in the community and integration courses are being organised in this place. All with a view to lowering the barriers for adults with low skills to enter a learning environment, without being officially registered in a school first. Furthermore the school for adult education offers a whole range of distance and e-learning courses to enable their students to combine study with their work-life.

In order to make efficient use of the possibilities created by new digital technologies, it is essential that the **workforce in public services acquires digital skills**.

Engaging into the digital transformation is a necessity for public services providers and employers. The risk of failing to do so for public services and employers is to lose their markets and customers to new market entrants already competitive in the digital economy. At the same time, the integration of digital tools will provide for benefits in terms of efficiency, customer satisfaction and business opportunities. There is a huge potential for the use of digital tools in the response to current societal challenges such as decarbonisation and an ageing population. In many ways, the success of the digital transformation of public service enterprises is an existential matter.

The opportunities for Services of General Economic Interests providers are several: enhanced connection between different business sectors of public utilities, further development and improvement of business models and services (e.g. data analytics) and reinforcing customer loyalty by offering easy access to services.

⁵ EFEE Peer Learning Activity to Flanders on “Excellence and innovation in education and supporting a new generation of educators”, 15 October 2015, hosted by GO! Education of the Flemish Community (member of EFEE); outcomes are available [here](#)

⁶ Freinetschool De Pluim: www.freinetschooldepluim.be

⁷ Atheneum Hoboken: <http://kahoboken.sgr1.g-o.be/>

⁸ CVO Antwerpen: <http://www.cvoantwerpen.be/>

Regarding the education sector, we see the development of digital skills as a necessary investment in our school leaders, professors, teachers and trainers, so that they may ensure the best possible work and life outcomes for their students – thus guaranteeing the prosperity and social cohesion of Europe. **Digital skills development provides an opportunity to increase quality, efficiency and equity in education.** Furthermore, it is important to mention that initial teacher education is no longer sufficient over the span of a teaching career. All teachers should have their vocational and pedagogical competences regularly updated through participation in appropriate professional development, performance management and self-evaluation programmes.

However, one should also be mindful that acquiring and further developing digital skills is not the sole responsibility of public service employers, but rather a joint effort involving all the key players in the sector: national and local authorities, teacher training institutions, VET providers, teachers, employers, trade unions, schools, school leaders and other stakeholders. Therefore, the financial and administrative burdens need to be shared between these stakeholders. Together, we need to be **innovative in providing training**: peer learning and train-the-trainers also provide welcome learning opportunities.

Regarding better visibility and use of available skills, we agree that there is need to improve **recognition of skills** acquired in flexible, non-school like settings and through further training. Therefore it would be good to reflect at European level on what is exactly meant by “learning outcomes”. However, we do not think that the European Commission should strive towards standardisation of learning outcomes, as learning, training and education systems are highly diverse in Europe. Instead, we should opt for flexible pathways rather than standardised formats.

Last but not least, we would like to underline the importance of an **interdisciplinary approach** to the Skills Agenda. In order to develop higher and more relevant skills for all there is a need for collaboration between all the stakeholders: education and training providers, public service providers, teacher training institutions, universities, research institutes, businesses, SMEs, social partners, etc. We would therefore suggest that at EC level all relevant Directorate Generals should be involved in this initiative and that the services of DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG CONNECT and DG RTD work closely together on these issues.

Please do not hesitate to contact us, if you would need any further information.

With kind regards,



Bianka Stege
General Secretary EFEE



Valeria Ronzitti
General Secretary CEEP