

# Position Paper

## UEAPME reply to the Green Paper

### Promoting the learning mobility of young people

#### Introduction

UEAPME welcomes the Commissions' initiative to publish a Green Paper strictly dedicated to the learning mobility of young people.

Numerous specific problems still remain to develop a larger mobility of young people and solutions have to be adapted to the type of mobility and target groups concerned.

Despite previous important initiatives from the 1996 Green Paper on the obstacles to transnational mobility to the more recent European Year of Mobility of Workers in 2006, there is still a low level of mobility across Europe which can be explained by a multiplicity of factors and can therefore only be addressed through a multidimensional approach.

This is why focusing on learning mobility of young people should more precisely contribute to identify where further efforts are needed.

A number of formal and informal barriers to the free movement of European citizens notably the young people still exist. The problems cut across the various EU policy areas - education and training, employment and social affairs, internal market, legal affairs, immigration, etc... but also within national policies.

Some of the more obvious barriers are the lack of language skills, a limited knowledge of opportunities, the lack of access to information and guidance, difficulties to have access to funding, the recognition of qualifications and professional experience, etc...

Less obvious, but at least as strong as the first ones, are the cultural, sociological and psychological barriers. Overcoming these barriers requires long-haul efforts at all levels because it also means an in-depth evolution of mindsets.

UEAPME has for a very long time insisted on the added value of this "fifth freedom" the free movement of knowledge and on the need to improve cross-border learning mobility for all young people on an equal footing whatever their background and the level and type of their studies<sup>1</sup>.

Developing a culture of mobility should start as early as possible, but mobility is not an end per se. It should serve the aim of a genuine European citizenship, of the development of professional and personal competences and finally of improving the competitiveness of the EU economy.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/0810\\_UEAPME\\_Resolution\\_on\\_mobility\\_en.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/0810_UEAPME_Resolution_on_mobility_en.pdf)

Therefore focusing on transnational learning mobility should contribute to make learning mobility of all young people no more the exception but the rule as it has been expressed in the Council conclusions on mobility in November 2008.

## II - Reply to the various questions

### Preliminary remark:

As UEAPME is mainly representing Crafts and SMEs interests, we will reply to all questions however with a particular emphasis on mobility obstacles of young people in vocational education and training (VET), an area where we have a more in depth experience.

### Chapter 1: Preparing for a Period of Learning Mobility

#### ***Q. 1.1 - How can the availability of information and guidance related to mobility be improved? Please provide examples of good practice, including appropriate tools and ways to make such information available.***

Access to information is the basis for all mobility initiatives. Information should equally address the key mobility actors such as institutions, professional associations, education and training structures, enterprises as well as individuals, in this case young people.

However different tools should serve the different audiences and tools should be primarily conceived in view of meeting their target group (s).

Last but not least each tool should be user friendly and information as complete as possible in different languages.

This is exactly what UEAPME and its members tried to achieve with the EURONAVER website [www.euronaver.net](http://www.euronaver.net) a European network providing targeted and multilingual information for representative organisations of skilled crafts, training providers, competent institutions in VET and intermediary organisations for enhancing cross-border mobility in VET.

One of the main lessons learned from this experience is the request to expand it further to cover more countries and more stakeholders.

Against this background, UEAPME strongly welcomes the new initiative taken by DG EAC to create a European Platform for fostering the mobility of young people in vocational alternating training notably apprenticeship.

Many projects, especially Leonardo da Vinci pilot projects and more recently transfer-of-innovation-projects produced information material, developed platforms and other tools (see also e.g. PRO MOBILITY [www.pro-mobility.net](http://www.pro-mobility.net), internship to industry: [www.internship2industry.eu](http://www.internship2industry.eu)).

In Belgium mobility is for a larger part related to higher education, vocational training or schools are not considered when it goes about transnational mobility.

At this stage it is important to guarantee the transparency and a good overview over existing material and information in order not to overwhelm interested newcomers and create new barriers through too much unstructured and confusing information. Existing internet-platforms and portals should be linked to show that they do not exclude each other. Selection of best practice tools and webpages would greatly help.

Information via internet and other electronic forms such as platforms of information are very important and useful but not sufficient, especially for new applicants. It is also important to have some “service points” like intermediary organisations that can give advice to interested companies, esp. SMEs, and participants on an individual basis or through the phone. Those organisations need to have the capacity to actively contact companies and schools and inform about possibilities to participate. Personal and direct contacts with experienced organisations providing examples of best practices help to overcome barriers and fears. Especially for young people who are usually used to

use the internet, (and also for their parents) it is important to have personal contact when it comes to leaving their country and their familiar environment on their own. Internet is very helpful, but is not enough.

Besides the existence of electronic tools, written information has to be further disseminated via info-points for young people, education and training centres, specific fairs and events, etc...

***Q.1.2 - What can be done to better promote and motivate young people to be mobile? How should this be done to ensure maximum effect? Please provide concrete examples of good practice in this area. What do you see as the main barriers to the motivation of young people to become mobile?***

Promoting mobility is another key topic that UEAPME raised years ago. And it should start by explaining the concrete benefits of mobility towards the young people.

The example of Erasmus gives us some useful hints about how to achieve a real success story. Erasmus is largely recognised all over Europe as a “mobility” brand also by people who are not directly beneficiaries of the programme thanks mainly ear say, students, their families and universities themselves. The best proof of its notoriety is the movie “L’auberge espagnole” playing around foreign students doing their Erasmus period.

It shows that there is **a clear shared responsibility of all stakeholders** to make mobility more attractive and its benefits better known.

Intermediary bodies such as schools, education and training centres, universities, professional associations but also youth organisations, public authorities notably at local and regional level have a key role to play towards young people, families and companies to promote mobility. Changing mindsets require converging efforts from the society as a whole starting from an early age within families, at school and later on along the education period at all levels.

Schools and training centres have particular responsibilities for promoting cross-border mobility. They are the first institutions where all young people are going to. They represent a huge underexploited potential for making all European youngsters acquainted with this mobility idea.

As already mentioned barriers to mobility are manifold but the lack of information of existing opportunities, the lack of local contact points, the lack of accessible technical support to organise and finance mobility, the lack of language skills and the psychological barriers belong to the more common obstacles. A wide range of solutions at local, regional or national level already exist and they should be further extended and promoted.

Besides the technical dimension, information and communication are key tools to contribute to change mindset.

Another key target group should be trainers. Trainers located in companies who work on a daily basis with apprentices play a key-role in the promotion of mobility especially for apprentices in dual or alternating training schemes. Trainers who made experiences abroad or work in an international environment usually also motivate the apprentices they are responsible for, whereas trainers who do not have any international experience themselves also face barriers. Special efforts should be made to address trainers in companies who are superiors and examples for the apprentices, but also multipliers. Courses and events for trainers should be used for the promotion of mobility.

***Q.1.3 - How can the linguistic and cultural obstacles to mobility be best addressed? Please provide examples of good practice.***

The knowledge of foreign languages plays an important role for boosting mobility. However it mainly relies on national education policies starting from the elementary school. Despite the European Barcelona target decided in 2002 progresses are limited. The Barcelona objective is far from being achieved (at least 2 foreign languages should be taught from a very early age) and the

new multilingualism strategic communication highlights the uneven progress notably for young people in VET.

This is a structural problem and progress requires time because many young people in the VET system have difficulties to understand the importance of foreign languages as long as they don't see their immediate use.

However based on various national experiences once young people have a serious mobility project, their motivation becomes a strong driver for catching-up and learning the minimum basic vocabulary to start abroad. It is mainly a "learning by doing" approach.

Language competences and language learning from an early age are a good preparation and motivation for European mobility, because during the process of language learning the learners also learn about other cultures and become curious about other countries. Specific measures for language preparation should be offered.

In any case efforts should be stepped-up at all levels to abolish linguistic and cultural barriers. In some countries like Belgium (French community) the experience of "immersion" education in primary schools helps a lot to tackle this problem.

***Q.1.4 - What are the main legal obstacles to mobility that you have encountered?***

***Please give concrete examples.***

***Can you provide examples of good practice in overcoming legal obstacles to mobility?***

The main legal obstacles to mobility are currently to be found in national legal frames. In the case of apprentices with a work contract legal problems are mainly related to the question of national labour law, social protection including health insurance and health and safety at work. It is generally solved on a bilateral basis using the Roma convention.

The second case is the mobility of young people who do not have the apprentice statute anymore. This situation of "post apprenticeship" is more delicate because the youngster has no more legal coverage by the school. In this case Member States should use the current EU existing legal frame for trainees.

A good practice is the Austrian case. According to the Austrian Vocational Training Act (Berufsausbildungsgesetz) apprentices are allowed to spend four and even more months a year during their apprenticeship training in another country, if training contents between sending and hosting company are agreed upon and correspond with the curricula and training aims in the home country. The training period spent abroad is fully recognised in Austria.

***Q.1.5 - What kind of obstacles have you encountered regarding the portability of grants and loans and access to benefits? Please give concrete examples?***

No specific comments on this topic from the European level.

***Q.1.6 - What more should be done to promote mobility to and from the European Union? How should this be done? Please provide examples of good practice.***

Attracting third country nationals to Europe is certainly something positive. However the visa question could become very burdensome. In order to find simple solutions Member States should apply the Directive 2004/114 covering unremunerated trainees.

Moreover as far as we know the EU should come in a near future with a new proposal for a directive covering third-country national remunerated trainees under an employment relationship as part of the economic migration package.

This should complete the total picture of third country national trainees or students.

More generally this chapter focuses more on university students. However some young people in IVET including apprentices can also encounter visa problems.

A good example is the once again the Austrian case where even in mobility interested youngsters from Austria's neighbouring countries or from Croatia or Turkey – countries already participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme – are not allowed to run a placement in another EU-country.

***Q.1.7 - What measures can be taken to ensure that the mobility period is of high quality?***

***Please provide examples of good practice.***

Quality and quality insurance should be full part of each mobility project from the preparation period to the follow-up. It is one of the key elements highlighted on the EURONAVER platform. A substantial part of EURONAVER's information is explaining the importance of the quality dimension and is providing with concrete tools and examples.

Quote of the EURONAVER Quality Chapter:

"Why is quality so important?"

International mobility is - and should be - a key factor to success for every SME – as long as the **quality of the work and training abroad** meets training goals geared to the company's needs. So companies, especially SMEs, and also the individual learners themselves will only be willing to participate in mobility projects **if the added value of the work and training abroad be ensured**. Work and training should therefore be carefully planned before starting the work or training abroad. What exactly are the skills to be acquired? What are the training contents? How does a placement abroad fit into the training curriculum at home? How can the learning achievements be documented and evaluated?"

The EURONAVER website offers a wide range of quality tools including a quality handbook with best practices, five essentials for quality with detailed elements about the 5 phases (preparation, legal framework, training contents, monitoring and certification and recognition of learning achievements), the Leonardo da Vinci partnership quality commitment as well as the European Quality Charter for Mobility.

In the case of young people in alternating VET and apprentices this quality insurance can only be guaranteed by strong and well-organised networks of intermediary bodies including the three main actors of mobility, training centres or schools from the sending country, the host structures (training institution or company) and the intermediary bodies which help to match the placement demand and offer.

Information on organisation, quality assurance, etc. via web tools is very helpful and necessary especially for persons organising placements for the first time. This should be completed by personal help, guidance and counselling. In this case intermediary organisations in general, such as IFA – International Young Workers Exchange ([www.ifa.or.at](http://www.ifa.or.at)) in Austria play a crucial role for the quality of placements.

***Q.1.8 - Which are the most important difficulties encountered by disadvantaged groups with regard to learning mobility? Please provide examples of good practice of how such difficulties can be overcome?***

We fully agree with the principle to give specific support to people with special needs in the various existing programmes where it is not already foreseen.

At EU level we don't have more detailed feedback so far on practical difficulties for these groups but although there are funding schemes for placements in other countries, travel and subsistence costs usually exceed the funding.

Therefore economically disadvantaged people have usually few or no possibility to get additional funding which in practical terms leads them to a certain extent to be excluded from European mobility.

## Chapter 2 – the Stay Abroad and Follow-up

### *Q.2.1 - Can you give some concrete examples of good practice in this area?*

Mentoring and integration fully belong to the quality criteria defined in the EURONAVER platform. The importance of practical arrangements should not be underestimated. No one can decently propose a good learning mobility scheme without providing strong help and support for an effective integration.

Hosting trainees requires important resources, sometimes even more than preparing good placements for outgoing trainees. Despite that all funding schemes and programmes focus on outgoing mobility, which should be revised.

### *Q.2.2 - In your experience, is the validation and recognition of both formal and non-formal learning still a significant obstacle to mobility? Please give concrete examples and your views on what can be done to improve the situation.*

The lack of recognition of competences acquired abroad uses to belong to the main obstacles to learning mobility at least in the VET area.

The new European tools EQF and ECVET will be of considerable help in the future to facilitate and encourage recognition of non-formal and informal learning especially acquired during longer-term mobility stays.

This is why UEAPME strongly supported the ECVET initiative from the beginning, because it should secure the transparency of qualifications and the full recognition and validation of competences acquired abroad.

The recognition and validation of competences acquired abroad during a mobility period is crucial and should be strongly put forward as an important driver to foster cross-border mobility demand among young people not benefiting from the ECTS.

The new ECVET initiative which is just starting with pilot projects requires strong partnerships and stable networks of intermediary bodies to create the necessary mutual trust and confidence necessary to put in place the recognition of learning outcomes acquired abroad.

## Chapter 3 – A New Partnership for Mobility

### *Q.3.1 - How can all actors and resources at national, regional and local levels be better mobilised in the interest of youth mobility? Can you provide examples of successful territorial partnerships? Can you provide good examples and innovative ideas on the funding of youth mobility?*

One of the main means to foster mobility are the financial resources. The EU lifelong learning programme provides mobility funding for students with Erasmus and young people in VET through the Leonardo da Vinci programme but both still continue to be marginal in absolute terms.

The EU and domestic regional funds represent an important and growing part of financial support for mobility schemes of young people in many European countries. It is very often organised under the form of a co-financing besides other sources like the European support.

Against this background, UEAPME welcomes the discussions launched by the LLL programme committee in October 2009, which specifically deals with evaluating how far ESF is used to support transnational learning mobility in Member States in particular also for trainees in IVET including apprentices. The results of this initiative should help to better define more targeted actions in view of increasing partnerships and co-financing measures.

However funding schemes should be somehow synchronised and as much as possible merged into a single fund for apprentices. They also should follow the same or similar access criteria and formalities notably concerning the rules to be applied for the expenses justification. Otherwise

participants and intermediary organisations supporting youth mobility may face huge new obstacles and go in a circle from one organisation to another which would create new concrete barriers.

Regions are important actors for financing mobility, however they cannot be considered as direct mobility actors. Regions themselves don't have the capacity to organise mobility projects. Their main task should be to encourage mobility through financial support and creation of various types of partnerships between professional organisations, chambers, schools, companies which are the real stakeholders for organising cross-border mobility.

The regional dimension offers on the one hand a great potential of proximity and on the other hand a better knowledge of needs of the local population.

***Q.3.2 - How can businesses be motivated to become more strongly involved in youth mobility?***

***Please provide examples of good practice.***

Mobility of apprentices cannot happen without a direct and strong involvement of companies and particularly Craft and SMEs because by definition the essence of the training type called "apprenticeship" requires spending a large part of the training pathway in a company.

Alternating training is based on a triangular relationship between the pupil/student, the training centre and the company.

Each mobility project for this specific group means a close cooperation between the three stakeholders in the sending country but also with the company and tutor in the receiving country.

In order to be motivated for mobility projects, small businesses have to be convinced about the added value of this learning mobility. For a small business sending an apprentice abroad for a certain period of time and/or receiving another apprentice means an important financial investment. The company should receive some financial support in order to be able to bear the additional costs. Companies accepting the mobility of their apprentices are also seeking for a good return on investment and one of the main conditions is that "the quality of the work and training abroad should meet training goals geared to the company's needs".

Beside good arguments in favour of cross-border mobility such as competence development, entrepreneurship, possible access to new markets, etc...small businesses need a strong technical support and some financial incentives notably during this difficult economic period firstly to recruit apprentices and then to accept them going abroad.

***Q.3.3 - How can we best make use of ICTs to provide valuable virtual mobility opportunities to enrich the physical mobility? Can the eTwinning approach be used in other learning sectors e.g. voluntary service, vocational sector?***

In practice most of the information and dissemination tools are already using the ICT and new technologies even if they don't organise eTwinning or virtual mobility.

At the time of information society ICT is an indispensable tool that could be optimise for the specific use of each target group, be it for virtual or physical mobility.

Electronic tools are very useful for information, dissemination, preparation of contacts and visits, share of resources but they will never replace the real mobility, the value added created by a total immersion in another cultural and linguistic environment.

***Q.3.4 - Should mobility opportunities for "multipliers" (teachers, trainers, youth workers, etc.) be given additional support and prominence in European programmes?***

***What do you see as the main obstacles to a stronger engagement of teachers and trainers in promoting mobility?***

Multipliers and ambassadors for youth mobility are important vectors. They notably played a key role in the notoriety of the Erasmus programme.

As already explained multipliers such as teachers and trainers are very important players when it comes to inform and motivate young persons to participate in European mobility. This is much easier for them, if they make their own experience in another country. It is of crucial importance to motivate trainers to participate in European mobility themselves. In the Lifelong Learning Programme multipliers and experts have to stay at least one whole week in another country. This is for most of the teachers and trainers too long and causes problems in companies and schools. It should be considered to reduce the minimum duration of an experts exchange to two or three working days.

The EU LLL programme should support the creation of such an “Association of VET students helping other VET students” with the aim of promoting learning mobility, providing services and information to other VET students.

***Q.3.5 - Do you consider targets a useful tool in defining a mobility strategy and if so, at what level (European, national, institutional, sectoral, etc.)? Please provide examples of good practice.***

Well defined and realistic targets are very useful to give a strong push for further developing mobility. They require the development of statistics and data and contribute to give a better overview of the situation.

Without statistical data, it is difficult to identify the real mobility situation of the various groups of young people. Targets also facilitate the evaluation of progress made and should help to correct some imbalance between target groups.

They contribute to comparisons and benchmarking between Member States as well as between regions.

However non realistic targets can create huge expectations and frustrations if they are not fulfilled.

Concerning targets UEAPME has been disappointed to see that for the first time concrete targets have been adopted in higher education by the Council in the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training in 2009, whereas vocational education and training is still lagging behind with a vague formulation stating that “the Commission is invited to study the possibility of extending such a benchmark to include VET and teacher mobility”.

This missed opportunity to reach the parity of esteem between VET and higher education should no more happen.

## **Conclusion:**

The Green Paper on learning mobility is covering all the main issues which still need to be tackled in order to make mobility of young people the rule instead of the exception. However this will become reality only if the discussions which will take place around this new initiative lead to future concrete actions like the creation of a specific programme with an earmarked budget line dedicated to apprentices within the framework of the Lifelong learning programme. Otherwise the Green Paper will simply complete the collection of initiatives with very limited tangible effects.

Brussels, 08/10/09

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